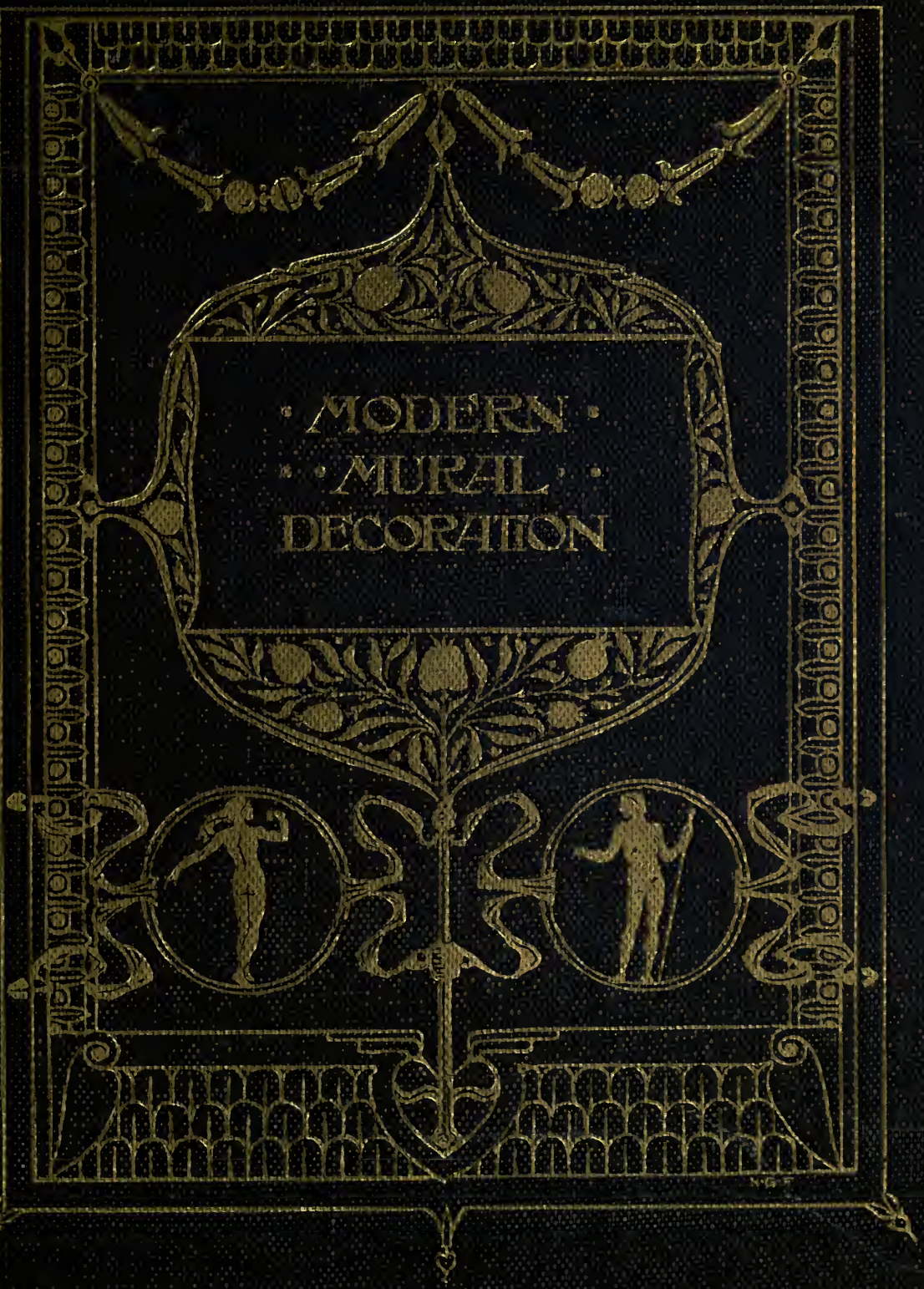
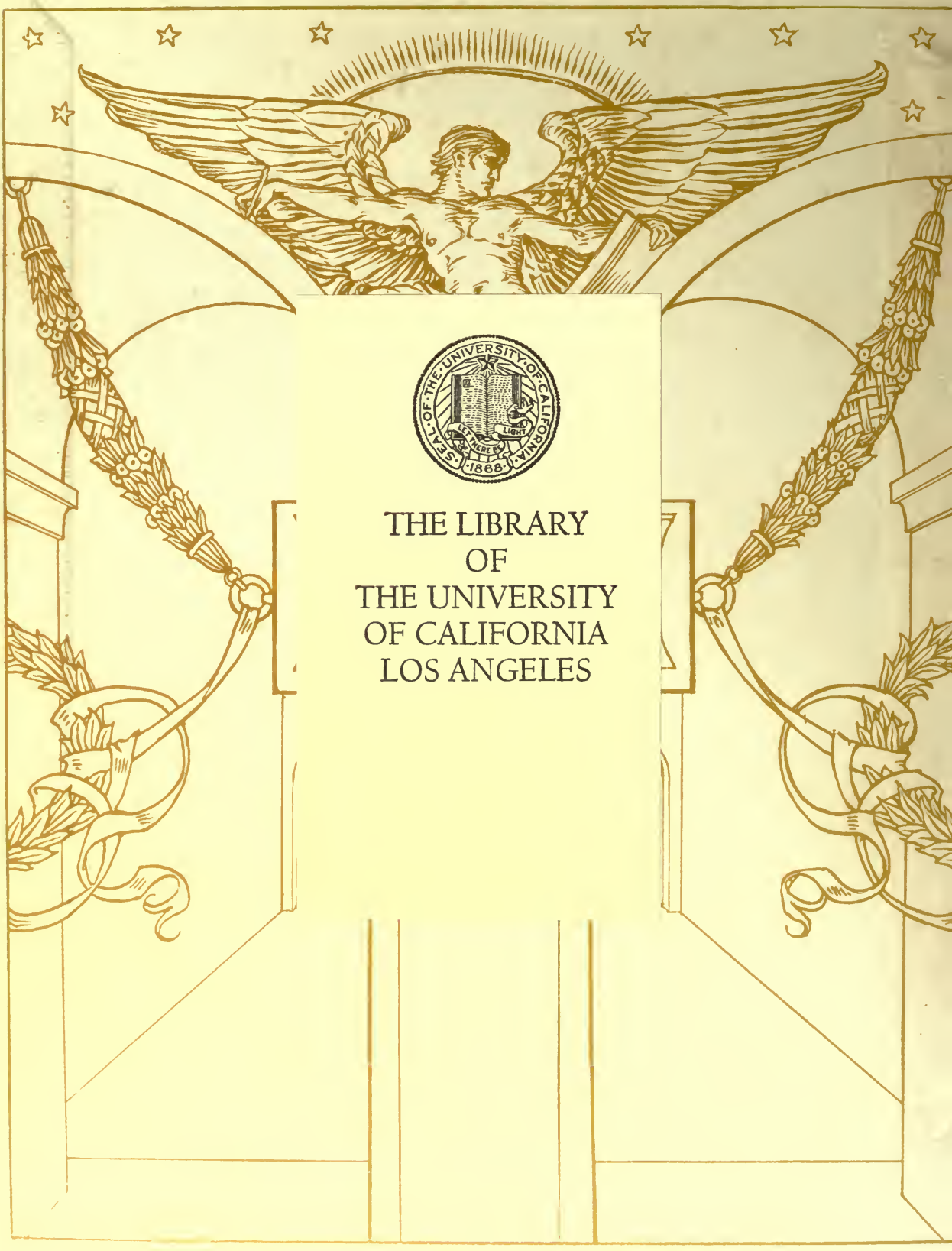
# MODERN MURAL DECORATION





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MODERN MURAL DECORATION

DESIGN FOR PANEL

F. BRANGWYN

# MODERN MVRAL DECORATION

BY A LYS BALDRY

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# INTRODUCTORY NOTE

There is at the present time a very perceptible tendency in the popular taste towards forms of Art which are in character decorative rather than pictorial; and, in recognition of this tendency, an attempt has been made to provide in this book some general information about the various technical processes by which the ornamentation of public and private buildings can be carried out. The history of these processes is recorded wherever necessary, and practical details are given when some explanation of the methods of execution seems to be advisable to make intelligible the modern application of ancient devices. As far as possible references to ecclesiastical decoration have been avoided, on the ground that they would be out of place in what is intended to be essentially a treatise on secular and domestic art.

CARTOON FOR MOSAIC

ALBERT MOORE

# MODERN MURAL DECORATION.

## INTRODUCTION.

What are exactly the properties and functions of decoration has long been one of the most debated questions in the whole range of artistic investigation. The subject certainly admits of argument, for it can be approached from more than one standpoint, and can be dealt with in several opposite ways. It is full of curious possibilities of discussion, in which men of strong convictions can take sides one against the other and assert logically enough very diverse ideas about matters of real importance. Tradition holds an undeniable sway over it, but yet it can be free and untrammelled and play its part in modern movements without any fear of being conventional or out of date. It is at the same time the oldest and the newest of the Arts, and the most susceptible of adaptation to suit the æsthetic necessities of any particular period. It serves the purposes of individual workers just as well as those of great schools or nations; and, chameleon-like, it changes its aspect according to its surroundings and the conditions under which it exists. Nothing can be said to be beyond its scope, because there is, practically, no artistic obligation which it cannot fulfil; and its comprehensiveness is equal to any demand which may be made upon it.

Necessarily, in any estimate of the value of such an adaptable and variable form of Art, personal feeling must have a considerable influence upon the conclusions which are arrived at. What is right or wrong in decoration, according to the view of different types of thinkers, is more often than not settled by these thinkers in rather a summary fashion. Each one fights for his own creed and condemns the rest as heretics and unbelievers simply because they do not accept his definition of what is legitimate. The pedant adopts a particular direction and keeps steadily to one track, blind to the fact that there lie on each side of him vast possibilities which he has never explored, and that there are all around him workers as earnest as himself who have not hedged themselves about with needless restrictions. The wanderer in the field of Art has, on the other hand, a tendency to lose himself in a mist of opportunities, and to run into extravagance merely because he is impatient of the control which the plodders in a beaten path would impose upon him, and because he is consumed with an anxiety to prove that their principles and methods are too formally commonplace to be worthy of respect.

As a result of this conflict many ideas have grown up with regard to decorative Art which are much to be regretted, because they obscure the real issues, and introduce into the discussion elements of uncertainty. One of the worst of these is the notion that decoration holds an inferior position among the forms of artistic expression. The designer, as many people conceive, does not rank with the picture painter, and has no claim to be judged by the higher standards of æstheticism. He is a craftsman rather than an artist, a person of indifferent capacities who takes up a minor form of practice because it is less difficult and throws a smaller strain upon his intelligence. That he has any right to attention as a serious worker endowed with special abilities and capable of doing great things in Art, or that the profession he follows requires more than

FRESCO, SALA DELLA SEGNATURA, VATICAN, ROME RAPHAEL

ordinary powers of invention and achievement, would be strenuously denied by quite a large section of the people who profess to have thought out the subject. They would condemn as a piece of unwarrantable assumption any demand of the decorator to be treated as a man of importance in the Art world, and they would relegate decoration to the subordinate place which it seems to them to deserve.

To this type of opinion is due that misapplication of the term "decorative," which mars so much of present-day criticism. It is the fashion to excuse incompetence in pictorial productions if only they have sufficient conventionality to pass muster as imitations of what has been done by some recognised master of design. An artist may be incapable

of drawing correctly, he may have no feeling for colour, and no sense of composition, but his work will be willingly accepted, simply because, with a knowledge of his own incapacities, he has had the wisdom to attach himself to a school and to suppress his individuality in an effort to copy the work of his predecessors. So long as he avoids any independent observation and merely follows in the wake of another man, or group of men, he will have a sort of reputation as a decorator, and will be allowed a place among the lesser lights of the profession. So little is expected of the worker who elects to give to his Art what is called in the jargon of the day a decorative character, that he need never trouble to learn his trade properly. He will, probably, flourish all the more because he does not know too much. Study of Nature might induce him to strive after originality, and to try to do his work in ways not sanctioned by custom; it might even lead him to imagine that the authorities on whom he is told to rely are not infallible. Anyhow, it would put him out of touch with his clients, because he would be offering them ideas of his own, and not the second-hand art which they prefer because it keeps to the lines to which they are accustomed.

It is, perhaps, the "man of taste" who is most to blame for the limitations which are intended to hamper the progress and development of decoration, and to deprive the men who practise it of all chances of exercising their initiative. He is generally a person learned in the history of Art, and well up in the methods adopted by artists of some particular period. He can quote a long list of authorities by whom he justifies his particular beliefs, and he can prove all sorts of contentions by reference to the records of past centuries. But the very extent of his learning blinds him, and shuts him off from any broad view of artistic responsibility. No Art work appeals to him which does not conform to the standards established in his mind by prolonged study of the methods of the school in which he believes. Only the modern man, who is unhesitatingly and

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uncompromisingly a follower of this school, seems to him to be worthy of consideration. He will buy a Burne-Jones picture because it agrees perfectly with his collection of Early Italians; he frequents the New English Art Club because he can find there exact imitations of the pretty trivialities of the Watteau period, or canvases which assort conveniently with the Rousseaus and Daubignys hanging in his rooms; he is always hunting for living painters who are as ardent believers in the past as he is himself. Original work, fresh in ideas and progressive in method, is abhorrent to him, because it seems to imply a doubt whether the masters, whom he regards as infallible, have really said the last word in Art.

Almost as dangerous as the man of taste is the individual who "knows what he likes." Such an one is always careful to explain when any Art question comes up for discussion, that he has no prejudices on artistic subjects, and no knowledge of technical details; but he has instead a pure, unsophisticated instinct for the Art that pleases, and an inspired capacity for picking out things which deserve attention. Nature has been good to him, and has given him unasked an endowment of æsthetic perception which lesser men can only acquire by laborious years of study. As this type of person usually has the means to gratify his undiscriminating preferences, he lays himself out to encourage Art, and buys what he likes with a delightful inconsequence. Unluckily, what he takes to be unsophisticated inspiration, born in him and retained in its primitive purity by avoidance of all particular knowledge, is only a mixture of ignorance and jumbled impressions derived from occasional visits to art galleries. He has an imperfect recollection of certain art examples, which other people have told him he ought to admire, and if he chances upon a living artist who faintly suggests to him something he has seen before, he is prepared to be enthusiastic, and to exalt a very imperfect bungler to the level of a master.

Between the pedant and the child of nature the decorator has by no

means a good time. The one binds him down to repeat the stock phrases that have ceased for centuries to have any real meaning, the other encourages him to mix up all the archaisms and affectations of his predecessors into a perfectly incoherent combination of odds and ends. Either way the result is deplorable, for it is without vitality or meaning, and leads to nothing but confusion. It is not surprising that decoration should rank in many minds as an inferior and unimportant art when the plodder who can imitate other men but can create nothing for himself, and the half educated craftsman who gleans the leavings of the greater masters, are accepted as the right exponents of its truths. If the value of decorative effort is to be estimated on such a basis as this the designer must indeed be denied a place of any prominence in artistic circles, and his best efforts must be judged to deserve at the most a degree of good-humoured toleration. He is merely a decorator, and must touch his hat to his betters who paint pictures.

But there is much to be said against this petty view of the functions of decoration. Because it has a history it is not necessarily bound up with the past, and because it is applicable to other things than gallery pictures it is not a legitimate refuge for the incompetent who have neither the capacity nor the education to excel in the higher walks of Art. Rather should it be regarded as the vital principle by which all forms of æsthetic activity are governed, as the foundation, indeed, of everything that is calculated to develop the finest qualities of accomplishment in the artist's practice. To reckon it as a minor art is to misconceive its whole position and utterly to misjudge its possibilities—to deprive it, in fact, of the best part of its value and authority.

At the outset it can be plainly asserted that the foremost mission of all Arts is to decorate. Whatever the form of expression, painting, sculpture, or design, it is the presence in it of the true decorative quality which determines its right to serious consideration. Without this quality

CEILING, APPARTEMENTE BORGIA, ROME PIERINI DEL VAGA

a work of Art can only make its appeal to attention because it possesses some characteristic of a more or less unæsthetic kind. Subject, sentimentality, dramatic effect, are not artistic essentials, but externals which have been added to Art with the idea of strengthening its hold upon the public mind. They are so many concessions to the popular craving for actuality, to that desire for the visible representation of things imagined which is one of the commonest yearnings of mankind. The average human intelligence is never content with mental pictures; it must be satisfied with concrete and tangible realisations by which the need for any exercise of the intellectual faculties is obviated. In all ages this desire has pointed the direction of artistic effort. It caused the production

of the earliest examples of pre-historic Art just as much as it called into existence the splendid sculptures of the Greeks, the altar-pieces and frescoes of the Italians, and the daintiest and most fanciful canvases of the French school. It is as much in evidence in the works of the modern illustrator as in the greatest masterpieces of the world.

Yet despite the concessions which, throughout the whole history of Art, have been made to this popular demand, despite the universality of the belief that the artist's duty is to preach, to instruct, or to illustrate, it is still possible to give to decoration the first place among the essentials of his equipment. From it spring all the qualities which make his achievement great. Drawing and composition, colour arrangement and distribution, the planning of light and shade, and the ordering of all the parts of his design into a coherent and logical pattern, are the fundamental subjects of study for the painter, just as the relations of lines and masses, the adjustment of proportions, and the balancing of projection and depression are matters which must be mastered by the sculptor; and these all have to be united in the training of anyone who aspires to take the highest rank in the artistic profession. But it is just this comprehensive knowledge that marks the true decorator; and he is, therefore, the worthiest and most completely qualified of all artists. He understands, far better than the man who cloaks his want of training under attractiveness of subject, what are his duties to Art; and he can produce works that are for all time, and not simply ephemeral expressions of some passing fashion.

If the classic masterpieces of any school or period are analysed it will be found that their greatness in each instance is in exact proportion to the extent of their decorative quality. The more closely they approach to the idea of technical completeness the more indisputable is their right to be regarded as the standards by which all other works of Art must be measured. They are recognised as masterpieces because the artists

WHAT WAS THERE SHE SAW
HER HEAD FELL BACK AND
SHE REMEMBERED OF ALL HER LIFE
RISE PSYCHE AND BE MINE FOR
EVERMORE FOR EVIL IS LONG
TARRYING ON THIS SHORE

WALL PAINTING IN THE EARL OF CARLISLE'S HOUSE, KENSINGTON

SIR E. BURNE JONES

who made them were consummate craftsmen, splendidly gifted and perfectly trained in every detail of practice. Mere subject matter would not give such immortality. Who—except the archæologist—cares now whether the Milo Venus is really a Venus or a personification of Victory; what true lover of Art concerns himself about the small points of doctrine illustrated in a fresco by Raphael? These things live because their decorative merits seem to the expert to be beyond all question, and because they embody all that is most to be desired in artistic creation. Their accomplishment makes them significant, although the meaning of the incidents they illustrate has been forgotten; and this significance no change of fashion or alteration in the popular taste can ever destroy. It is the one link by which all schools and periods are inseparably connected; and it is immutable.

To everyone then who believes that no distinction can be made between forms of Art, and that the same principles govern the whole range of artistic intention, the suggestion that decoration is a kind of refuge for the incompetent is peculiarly objectionable. It is simply ridiculous to say that any man who is worthy to be called a decorator is not at the same time entitled to a place among the greatest of his profession. He has, if he rightly bears the name, an all-round knowledge of details of craftsmanship, an exact judgment in matters of selection and arrangement, and a practically infallible sense of style; he has originality and inventiveness, and he is capable of dealing successfully with any problem of practice that may chance to present itself. To follow obediently in the path laid down by the people who do not understand his mission would be an impossibility to him; he is made to lead others, and to show them the way to realise their highest aims. Everything should be done to encourage his independence of spirit, for his influence is sound and wholesome and its importance cannot be over-estimated. He does more than anyone else to keep Art alive, to guard it from

becoming conventionalised and commonplace, and to prevent the growth of fallacies which might endanger its vitality.

But it is not to be denied that there is a vast amount of prejudice which must be destroyed before this higher estimate of the status of the decorator gains general acceptance. People will insist upon drawing preposterous distinctions, and it is difficult to get them to see that in doing so they are going contrary to all the teachings of common sense. Yet the analogy of the past, on which so many fallacious arguments are based, proves plainly enough that nearly all the greatest masters in the history of Art were not only learned students of the principles of decoration, but actual decorators even in the modern sense of the word. The noblest relics of ancient Greece are sculptures executed for the adornment of buildings; Michael Angelo's greatest achievements were architectural carvings and frescoes painted on walls and ceilings; Raphael's fame rests chiefly upon the paintings with which he ornamented the palaces and churches of his native land, and a host of the more famous Italians earned in the same way their right to be remembered. In all periods and in all countries there are endless instances to be found of the application of the highest artistic capacities to such purposes; only in the present day has the idea sprung up that the artist's dignity suffers if he follows the example of the men who were incomparably his superiors in their command over all the subtleties of their craft.

The source of all the trouble is that there has come about a confusion between the purpose of Art and the means by which that purpose is realised. The older masters frankly accepted the obligation to decorate as greater and more important than the idea of satisfying commonplace minds by telling pleasant stories or illustrating popular incidents. They did not disdain subject, but they made it secondary to the more vital details of arrangement and execution; and, without ignoring the popular craving for actuality, they took care to justify to the utmost their sound

WALL PAINTING IN THE SORBONNE, PARIS

PUVIS DE CHAVANNES

conception of the duties which were imposed upon them by their position. To have regarded these duties lightly would have seemed to them a breach of faith, a lapse in conscientiousness which would have made them unworthy to associate with men of honour, and unfit for admission into the company of serious workers.

Now, however, every other consideration has given way to the delusion that the supreme obligation of the artist is to please the public without reference to the best traditions of his profession and without any respect for his own dignity. He has sold himself to the people who know little and care less about the functions of Art, and for the sake of earning their approval he has put aside the teaching of centuries of earnest effort. It is sufficient for him if he can gain popularity; that is the only purpose which he recognises, and any means are good enough to bring it about. Whether his work has or has not the right decorative spirit is a point of minor importance; if its subject suits the crowd its manner and style will pass, no matter how incompetent they may be. The real responsibilities of Art he systematically disregards, because he sees that the sincere man who strives to fulfil them is flouted and despised, and is ridiculed as a fanatic blind to his best interests.

Still, even in these degenerate days, and despite the subservience of the mass of Art workers, it is possible to find a few great men who uphold devotedly what they know to be the purest and truest type of practice. They keep alive the old ideals and help to counteract bad influences; and round them the small band of believers can rally. It is to such artists as Puvis de Chavannes, and Albert Moore, Rodin, Alfred Stevens, and Gilbert, G. F. Watts, Leighton, Frank Brangwyn, and Burne-Jones, that we owe what is best in the record of the nineteenth century; and it is due to their example, and to that of some others of like conviction, that we have among the younger aspirants, from whom great things may be expected during the next few years, a reasonable number of intelligent

and skilful decorators. The productions of these modern masters stand out as the rare exceptions in the multitude of commonplaces designed for popular consumption; and by their superlative merit they introduce an element of hopefulness into the position of affairs.

Indeed, signs are not wanting that a great revival of the better principles of decoration is at hand. For some few years the demand for the subject picture has been slackening and the popularity of painted sentiment and episodical sculpture has been on the wane. Instead there is slowly growing up a taste for Art objects which will add a little colour and artistic variety to everyday surroundings. The better sort of collector is learning to look for qualities of execution and method in the things he buys, and is becoming accustomed to require from the men in whom he interests himself evidences that they possess faculties to which the purveyor of popular Art cannot lay claim. If this healthy feeling can be fostered and its scope widened there will be undoubtedly a satisfactory response from the workers themselves—from many potential masters who need only a measure of encouragement to justify their position to the utmost. But this encouragement must be sincere; and it must spring from an honest understanding of the true relation of decoration to the other forms of Art.

WALL PANELS

FRANK BRANGWYN

# SECTION I.

## MURAL PAINTINGS.

There is hardly any form of Art expression which does not lend itself more or less completely to the purposes of mural decoration. If the history of Art through a long succession of centuries is studied it will be found that to the ornamentation of surface, and to the adornment of buildings within and without, artists of all types have devoted consistently the best of their capacities and the largest part of their energies. The most ingenious adaptations of technical devices, the most careful applications of artistic knowledge have been employed from time immemorial to produce results that would be at the same time effective and permanent. Mural decoration—using the term in its widest sense—can be said to have always claimed the services of the greatest craftsmen, and it is associated with nearly all the most striking displays of æsthetic activity. In most countries, and at most periods, it has encouraged the noblest developments of thought and practice, and it is responsible for the majority of the splendid undertakings by which the progress of Art in the civilised world has been punctuated.

What were its earliest beginnings it is impossible to say. Even as far back as 4500 B.C. it had been carried by the Egyptians to a high pitch of completeness and it was then subject to definite rules of expression which seem to suggest many previous stages in its evolution.

The remains which have been handed down to us from that remote period consist mainly of sculptures carved in low relief and generally coloured with much brilliancy. They are full of invention, and are designed with marked ingenuity and with a strong sense of style. They imply the existence in Egypt at that time of a cultivated Art belief which played a part of much significance in the national life, for decorations of this class were introduced freely into most of the important buildings. There exist, too, many wall paintings of about the same date, which show how thoroughly these early artists studied the principles of polychromatic ornament, and how well they understood the mechanism of the Arts they practised.

It is probable that the example of Egypt influenced very considerably the methods adopted by other nations. In Assyria, about 1000 B.C., the same type of low relief work was used with admirable effect. In Greece, too, the character of the Archaic carvings was essentially Egyptian, and even at the finest period of Greek Art the fashion of colouring sculpture realistically continued to prevail. But as time went on the formality of the Egyptian style gave way to a freer rendering of nature and to more perfect representation of living forms. The scope of Art widened, and the ambition of the workers to attempt higher flights steadily increased. New forms of decoration were invented, new ways of applying the teaching of the past were discovered. Changes in modes of study produced changes in aim and intention, and on these were built up a system of practice which gave the fullest opportunity for the exercise of individuality and for the assertion of personal conviction.

Now, there is at the disposal of the decorator practically every device which exists for putting artistic imaginings into a visible and tangible shape. If he wishes to paint, he can work in fresco, in tempera, or in oils; he can translate his designs into mosaic or carry them out in some ceramic material; he can carve them in stone, or model them in clay; he

WALL PAINTING, PANTHEON, PARIS — PUVIS DE CHAVANNES

can work in metals, plaster, wood; and he can combine various substances so as to produce an ingenious harmony of textures or a pleasant contrast of surfaces. There are no serious disabilities to hamper him in the expression of his ideas, for every medium is legitimate if it will help him to results that are in accordance with correct taste. He may aim at effects which would be by no means permissible in pictorial production, and, without transgressing the true laws of Art, he can launch out into fields of accomplishment which are closed to the ordinary artist.

All that is required of him is a proper knowledge of the crafts which play a leading part in decorative work—that he has the necessary endowment of sound capacity is pre-supposed. Unless he understands the management of his technical resources, and is trained to appreciate the difference between the right and the wrong way of using his materials, he cannot hope to make a real success in his profession. To design intelligently he must know how the medium in which he proposes to realise his intentions will serve him, and he must be practically acquainted with its advantages and limitations. Abstract theories about artistic expression are no good unless they have been tested by actual experience, and the impracticable dreams sifted out from the ideas which are capable of expansion; they would only lead him into blind alleys of imagination and would bring him to a dead wall of impossibility.

But when once he has learned the mechanism of his work he is never likely to be checked by the feeling that he must limit his ambitions because they outrun the means at his disposal. What he cannot attempt in one medium is perfectly possible in another, and the more closely he studies the particular properties of them all, the more immediate will be his recognition of the chances which each one affords. Out of this knowledge, indeed, come that admirable ease of manner which marks the true master of his craft, and the atmosphere of fitness which gives to all Art work its best and most attractive quality.

Among the many methods of decorating surfaces the one which claims foremost consideration is mural painting—the application of pictorial designs to the adornment of walls and ceilings. It is the most attractive and the most credible of all artistic devices, and it makes the greatest demand upon the skill of the executant. The best work of this class requires of the men who would produce it a particular thoroughness in draughtsmanship and composition, a special understanding of the relation between lines and masses, a true feeling for arranging and harmonising colour, and an exceptional largeness of style. It must be treated without any hint of pettiness or triviality, and yet it must avoid emptiness. In a word, it must possess all the qualities of picture painting in its highest form with the addition of some others peculiar to itself. Above all, it must be in right relation to its surroundings, and must fit properly with the architectural scheme of the building into which it is introduced.

## Fresco.

As a complement to architecture fresco is probably the most adequate of decorative processes. When it is handled by an artist who knows its technicalities it is permanent and reliable, and it allows full scope for the exercise of the greatest qualities of design. It does not lend itself to the production of the gorgeous colour effects which are attainable in oil painting, but it permits the use of a considerable range of colours, and will give results that are amply brilliant and yet pleasantly delicate. The conditions which have to be observed by any one working in it are by no means complicated, and are not difficult to understand; they involve a certain degree of acquaintance with laws of chemistry and with practical details of building construction. These matters, however, call for comparatively little study, and are easily mastered at the outset, for they are subject to simple rules based upon the experience of centuries.

The art of fresco painting in its pure form is limited to work upon

FRESCO IN THE SALA DELLA SEGNATURA, VATICAN

RAPHAEL

plaster which has been newly laid upon the wall. The colours are applied to the surface while it remains damp, and are allowed to soak into the actual body of the plaster, so that they dry with it and become solidly incorporated with the material. In working it is necessary to calculate carefully the area which can be covered in each day's operations, for directly the plaster dries it will not take the colours properly; therefore, any part of it which the artist has been unable to deal with must be cut away and re-applied on the next day. The colours used must be such as will not suffer from contact with lime. The mediæval fresco painters employed earths of various tints, which were mixed with specially prepared lime so as to produce a considerable range of gradation; but the palette of later workers has been extended by the addition of some chemical colours.

The history of fresco commenced long before the Christian era, but the great development of the art began in Italy in the thirteenth century. The Romans were well acquainted with its principles, and practised it with considerable skill; evidences of this are plentiful in the buildings at Pompeii. The Italians, however, enlarged its scope and increased its possibilities, and adapted it to the highest purposes of decoration. During four or five centuries it continuously engaged the attention of the greatest masters among them, and was regarded as the medium most suited for works of monumental importance. Many splendid examples still remain to show how great was the conception of the functions of mural painting which was formed at that period, and to justify the claim of the Italians of the Renaissance to be considered as the most accomplished exponents of this type of Art.

Yet it must be noted that fresco painting as practised in Italy during the Middle Ages was generally a mixed process. The method of working on wet plaster with simple colours and without retouching was very frequently departed from, and was often combined with painting "a

secco"—with painting, that is to say, on the plaster after it had been allowed to dry. This mixed process was adopted because, by its assistance, more vigorous effects of colour could be produced than in pure fresco, and because the application of the pigments to a dry ground was easier to control. It gave the artists greater freedom in carrying out elaborate designs, for they were less restricted in handling and less limited in forms of expression. Many of the most famous wall paintings of the Italian school were commenced in pure fresco and afterwards finished in distemper.

This was the method employed by Giunta Pisano in the thirteenth century, by Cimabue, and later by Giotto. It is notable, however, that Giotto diminished the amount of distemper painting, and depended more upon the completeness of the pure fresco beneath. At this stage in the development of the art the work on the wet plaster was treated as a preparation for the subsequent painting "a secco," as a grounding, in fact, which would enhance the effect of the distemper. Skies were under-painted in red, draperies in red, black, or grey, trees in black, and on these grounds the more realistic distemper colours were applied. But gradually this convention was changed for a simpler mode of treatment. Masaccio headed a movement which went far to purify the art of fresco. He almost entirely abandoned retouching with distemper and obtained the best results by direct painting. Yet his decorations are lacking in none of the qualities of richness and strength which were aimed at by the men who used the mixed method. His handling, too, was extraordinarily free and decisive, and there was a rare nobility in his design.

But it was at the hands of Raphael and his contemporaries, Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo, that fresco received its most impressive illustration. The works executed by Raphael and Michael Angelo are especially memorable because they show emphatically what are the capacities of the art when practised by masters who combine the

WALL PAINTING
HOUSE OF LORDS
W. DYCE, R.A.

highest qualities of invention and technical accomplishment. Michael Angelo's most famous achievement is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Raphael's the series of compositions which were painted, partly by himself and partly by his pupils, in the Vatican. In these Vatican frescoes Raphael worked at first in the mixed method, but as he went on he depended less upon retouching, and in the "School of Athens" seems to have trusted almost entirely to direct painting. His pupils, however, were less particular; they used a variety of devices, and after Raphael's death even went so far as to abandon fresco and to execute in oils some of the decorations for which he had left designs. As a consequence much of this later work has hopelessly decayed or has been seriously altered by chemical changes.

The popularity of the art has perceptibly waned since the time of Raphael, but it has never died out. Indeed, many more or less successful attempts have been made to revive its glories and to induce artists and Art lovers to reinstate it in its right position at the head of all forms of pictorial expression. In Italy it has been continuously employed to the present day for the internal and external adornment of buildings, and all the best executive traditions have been scrupulously maintained. There are now in that country many fresco painters who can handle the medium as capably as the sixteenth or seventeenth century artists and lack only the endowment of equal genius to rival the great masters of the Renaissance. In fact these modern men have a better judgment than their predecessors, for they paint carefully in pure fresco and take none of the risks which are inseparable from the use of distemper on the plaster surface. They have learned what to do and what to avoid from close study of the old mural pictures, and have profited well by the lessons which these teach.

In other countries there have been given from time to time evidences of the interest which decorators take in this manner of painting. At the

beginning of the nineteenth century a group of German artists made very careful investigations into the methods of fresco. They acquired their knowledge at Rome, and imparted it to a number of their followers and pupils with excellent results. Indeed, they founded a school which grafted many scientific improvements upon the Italian system, and proved by the merit of the work it produced that it possessed a proper appreciation of the technical advantages which could be obtained by careful contrivance. Some memorable paintings were executed in Germany by these men, who used their knowledge with remarkable intelligence.

Less success, however, attended the effort made more than half a century ago to popularise fresco in England. When the present Houses of Parliament were built it was decided that some of the rooms and corridors should be decorated in this way, and a number of leading artists were commissioned to prepare designs. Sir John Tenniel, E. M. Ward, W. Dyce, D. Maclise, C. W. Cope, and other men of note at that time actually painted upon the walls ambitious compositions full of elaborate detail and minutely handled, but better in intention than in technical quality. The artistic conventions, which were then affected by the members of the British School, lent themselves but indifferently to the development of the decorative style appropriate to the medium, and the experience which the artists had of the methods essential for fresco was insufficient to enable them to overcome its mechanical difficulties. The paintings began, soon after they were finished, to show that they were incapable of resisting the climatic and chemical influences to which they were necessarily exposed in such a building, and many of them have been since going through a steady process of degeneration. In a few further instances experiments have been made by other British artists, but generally with little enthusiasm, and with scanty encouragement from the public.

Really, with the exception of one large painting by Mr. G. F. Watts,

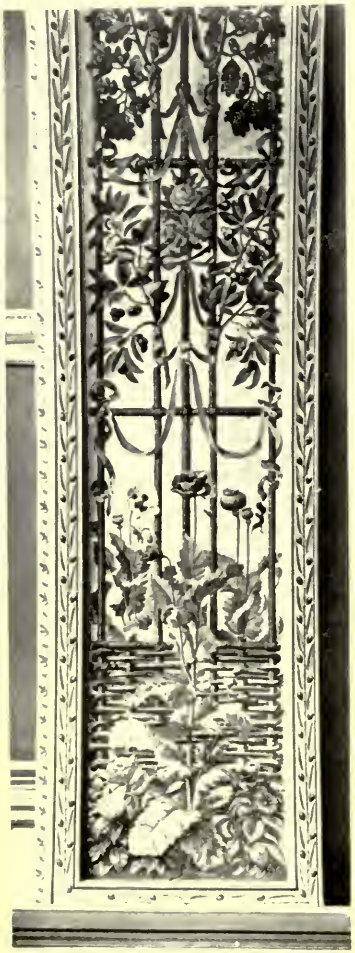
WALL PAINTING, HOUSE OF LORDS C. W. COPE, R.A.

DESIGN FOR FRESCO SIR E. J. POYNTER, P.R.A.

and Sir E. J. Poynter's unfinished decorations in the Lecture Theatre of the South Kensington Museum, hardly any important works in fresco have been undertaken in this country during more recent years. The idea that the art is too uncertain and unreliable to be safely used, and that it is especially unsuited to the English atmosphere, has rightly or wrongly come to be accepted by people in the profession and out of it. Whether this belief is justified by facts is a matter for argument. That the few frescoes which have been executed here have not been particularly successful seems unfortunately to be undeniable; but the failures may arise from the insufficient technical knowledge of the painters themselves and from the imperfection of the mechanical arrangements followed in the preparation of the wall.

For it must not be forgotten that the life of a fresco is affected both by preliminary details of building construction and by the methods employed in the actual painting. Damp is one of the chief causes of decay, and if the wall is not kept perfectly dry anything painted upon it

is certain to suffer seriously. Changes in the colours produced by the action of the lime in the plaster, or by the contact of injurious chemicals in the air are very common; and the decorations in which there has been much mixture of processes are specially likely to suffer in this way. Carelessness in laying on the plaster is apt to bring cracking of the surface or even the peeling off of portions of the picture.



FRESCO. SIR E. J. POYNTER, P.R.A.
LECTURE THEATRE,
SOUTH KENSINGTON.

Uneven or coarse plastering is another source of trouble, as dust collects upon any projections, and, as time goes on, stains and darkens the painting in unsightly patches. It is in avoiding these defects of mechanism that the experience of the fresco painter is tested. No man can hope to score a permanent success unless he can foresee and guard against such possibilities of failure.

The old workers often took elaborate precautions to ensure the permanence of their achievements. The Romans had a particular way of constructing a wall on which painted decorations were to be placed—they made them of brick, separated by an air space from the main walls of the building, and by proper damp courses they protected them from any moisture which might rise from below or soak in from above. The Germans in their revival of fresco restored these ancient methods of construction; and by along series of experiments fixed the manner of preparing

the lime used to make the plaster and to mix with the colours. They added also to the palette of the Italians several reliable pigments, which give to modern painters chances of making chromatic combinations inaccessible to the mediæval artists.

That much depends upon the completeness with which these technicalities are mastered is obvious. But with enough attention to working principles, the modern British artist may fairly hope to do himself credit as a worker in fresco. In its pure form the art is mechanically and æsthetically well worthy of a place among our available decorative devices, and its difficulties are not so great that a sincere man who cares to study them intelligently need fear for the result. He must know, however, how to direct the workpeople who prepare the wall surfaces which he proposes to adorn, and he must have sufficient restraint over himself to keep out of his practice the dangerous tricks which will enhance his work temporarily at the expense of its lasting qualities. If these conditions are fulfilled, there are still possibilities for fresco painting in England.

### Water-Glass.

Some years ago artists in this country gave a good deal of attention to the process known as water-glass painting. It was used in combination with, and as a substitute for, fresco in the Houses of Parliament, but its results there were not sufficiently encouraging to make it permanently popular. But of late years it has been greatly improved by German inventors; and it deserves now to be included among the safer mediums. Mr. Brangwyn has applied it successfully to exterior decoration, where it is exposed to rather severe tests, and other painters have executed, with its assistance, works of definite importance. Of course, in its modern form it has not been practised long enough to put its lasting qualities entirely beyond doubt, but it promises so well that it can be recommended as a very practicable and convenient addition to the available methods.

Its chief disadvantage seems to be that it is a little complicated in working. It must be managed with rather elaborate care, and all its mechanical conditions must be scrupulously observed if its best qualities are to be properly brought out. First of all the wall is thoroughly moistened, and on it is laid a thin coat of lime and sand mortar mixed with distilled water or filtered rain-water. This coat is thrown on rather roughly with a trowel, and before it is quite dry it is covered with a second layer of plaster solid enough to fill up all irregularities and to make the whole surface level and smooth. This coat must be allowed to dry slowly, and, if necessary, the drying must be retarded by occasional moistenings, so that there may be perfectly even setting throughout.

When the wall is absolutely dry it is primed with a special preparation mixed with lime and distilled water. This priming is laid on very thinly and in as fluid a state as possible, and is carefully smoothed before it dries. Then it is left for a few days until no moisture remains in it or in the plaster beneath, when it has to be hardened and fixed. This is done by soaking it thoroughly with a mixture of ferro-silicic acid and water applied freely with a brush. Another period for drying follows; then come another soaking with distilled water, another drying for twenty hours, and a final washing with a mixture of water-glass of potassium and water. Two coats of the water-glass are given with a large flat brush, and each one must dry properly. Two points at this stage need attention, the water-glass must not form a crust on the surface, and must not fill up the ground sufficiently to destroy its absorbent quality.

The colours used in the painting on the wall are specially prepared in Germany. They are diluted with distilled water and are put on freely. The part of the wall which is being worked upon is first moistened, and must be kept damp while the painting is in progress; but care must be taken that no water runs down on to other parts of the picture. As soon as the whole work is completed, it is given ample time to dry, and is then

DESIGN FOR
WATER GLASS DECORATION
FRANK BRANGWYN

fixed with a fluid fixative brushed on warm or sprayed on with a particular kind of syringe. Several coats of this fixative are usually applied, the syringe being used at first while the colours are still tender, and a brush, if preferred, after the first coats have hardened. Each coat must be allowed twelve to twenty-four hours so that it may be fully absorbed, and only so much of the fluid as the wall will take up should be put on each time, any excess of moisture is carefully removed with blotting paper or a clean rag.

If all these technical details are carefully attended to the inventors of this method of water-glass painting claim for it a certain success. The actual painting can be best carried out in damp weather, as then the wall remains in a good condition for working on without the necessity arising for frequent moistenings; but the fixing must be reserved for dry, warm weather, when the atmospheric conditions favour quick absorption throughout the various layers of the painting. For this reason the preparation of the wall and the fixing are both better done in the summer months, when no changes in the quality of the air are likely to affect the result. If for any reason the fixing has to be done during a damp or cold season the face of the picture must be heated by means of braziers and kept at a fairly high temperature until all the details of the process are fully complete. Much of the permanence of the picture depends upon the strict observance of the rules laid down—rules that are, indeed, not unreasonable when applied to work which is intended to be proof against all kinds of atmospheric tests through a long term of years.

Clearly the process is one which appeals to artists who have taken the trouble to understand its technicalities. In its perfected form it seems to have lived down its former disrepute and to have secured a fair measure of confidence in its capabilities. At present, however, there is hardly sufficient evidence of its fitness to resist the English climate. Our variable weather might affect badly some of those stages of the

WATER-GLASS DECORATION FRANK BRANGWYN

work for which a period of warmth and dryness is necessary; and whether it could be trusted for external decorations here is clearly open to question. Mr. Brangwyn's use of it out of doors was made in Paris where the climatic conditions are unlike those to which we are accustomed Still it might serve English decorators well in the interior of a building where the necessary arrangements could be controlled with some degree of certainty; and no sincere craftsman would complain of the complexities of the method if they helped him to success.

## Tempera.

Mention has already been made of the way in which the older Italian decorators used tempera—painting in distemper—as an adjunct to fresco, and some of the disadvantages that arise from combining the two processes have been noted. But though many instances could be quoted to prove the inadvisability of mixing more or less opposite methods in the same piece of work it must not be assumed that distemper painting when properly handled is not a valuable and important mode of expression. The objections to it in fresco are due to the fact that it does not admit of cleaning—it will not bear washing—and that time affects it more markedly. It often darkens with age, while true fresco does not, or, at all events, not to the same extent. In wall paintings which have been begun on wet plaster, and finished afterwards in distemper on the dry surface, the changes in the retouching have frequently upset the whole colour scheme, and have even reversed the light and shade composition by turning lights into darks.

But so many notable decorations have been executed in tempera that it must be accounted a medium of infinite adaptability. It has a long and honourable history, for it is probably, in one or other of its forms, the oldest of all technical processes. It was in almost universal use before oil painting was perfected, and it was practised in all countries from the most remote periods. The brilliant and elaborate decorations which were carried out by the Egyptians were in tempera on a stucco ground; a similar method was employed by the Greeks; and much of the Roman painting was in distemper with the addition of wax as a fixative.

Among the Italians there were several well-recognised varieties of tempera. They differed in the diluent employed to reduce the pigments to a proper consistency for working and to hold them together when dry.

Of all these, and there were several of them, the most popular were the yolk and white of an egg, used sometimes separately and sometimes together. Occasionally the milky juice from twigs of the fig-tree was mixed with the eggs as a solvent, sometimes wine or wine and water, and sometimes other substances like honey or vinegar. The pigments seem to have been ground into a paste with water and the egg medium then added in the desired proportion. In the practice of some painters size or gum was substituted for egg; and combinations of various mediums were not uncommon in the same painting. All these preparations were made in accordance with definite rules based upon long experience, and a thorough acquaintance with such technical matters was an essential part of the equipment of the Italian painters.

Directly oil painting came into fashion tempera was abandoned. It died out suddenly without going through any lingering degeneration, and ceased to be reckoned among the available painting processes. Lately, however, some serious efforts to revive it have been made; and a small number of artists have experimented with it in pictorial practice. Sir Edward Burne-Jones handled it with much skill, and several of his followers have managed it not unsuccessfully. But its application in modern decoration has been chiefly limited to cheap and unimportant work, and it has been taken under the wing of the house painter rather than the artist. One simple form of it, tempera mixed with size, is commonly used by scene painters, who find it convenient for their work because it dries quickly and with a dead surface, and because it lends itself well to the production of fairly brilliant colour effects. But it can be no longer hailed as an effective agent in mural painting, and but for its occasional appearances in church interiors it might be said to be in a state of suspended animation.

WALL PAINTING FRANK BRANGWYN

### Spirit Fresco.

The unsatisfactory nature of the results attained by English artists in their dealings with true fresco has led to various attempts to find a substitute which would be easier to manage and more certain in its mechanism. The most successful of these attempts was that made some years ago by Mr. T. Gambier Parry, who invented the process known as spirit fresco. The aim of the inventor was to enable wall painters to dispense with the wet plaster surface, with the necessity for limiting themselves to those colours only which would not suffer by contact with lime, and to escape the obligation to labour under a system with which they were necessarily unacquainted. They were to have at their disposal a method which would permit modern pigments in all their shades and varieties of colour to be used upon the wall, and yet would protect even delicate chemical compounds from being modified by the action of the atmosphere—one that would help them to accomplish monumental works in the right manner.

There was in this invention something more than the concoction of a new medium ingeniously made up of old ingredients; really it created a whole system of mural painting which embraced all sorts of technical details from the preparation of the wall to the perfecting of the surface of the finished picture. Of course, it was based upon earlier knowledge—in this, indeed, lies much of its value—and it took into account the successes and failures of previous generations of decorators. But it also adapted itself to the conditions of present day existence, and by anticipating difficulties cleared the way for effective results.

Underlying the whole scheme was the idea that the best way to secure permanence for mural paintings was to execute them as far as possible in a material which would resist most of the influences likely to be dangerous to them. The material which Mr. Gambier Parry chose was wax, perhaps

the most imperishable of any that can be adapted to the artist's purposes, and he made it the medium for binding together his colours as well as for securing them immutably on the wall surface. Of course, painting with wax was no new discovery. It has been used by painters from time immemorial, and its properties are well understood. The Romans, as has been already mentioned, turned it to excellent account as a preservative for their tempera decorations, and artists of later times have tested it in all sorts of ways, and have rarely found it wanting.

The method of the Romans, as far as it can be judged from the paintings which remain, was eminently scientific. They seem to have begun by laying on the wall a plaster or stucco ground coloured in true fresco, and this ground was then waxed and polished until it was perfectly smooth. On this the subject was painted in tempera, and as soon as the tempera was dry it was given a coat of melted wax brushed on hot. Finally by means of a hot iron held near the surface the wax was fused into the ground and thoroughly incorporated both with the stucco and the superimposed distemper colours. By this device the various parts of the picture were welded together and the pigments were properly locked up in the medium. Sometimes wax was actually mixed with the colours before they were painted on to the plaster ground, but this made no difference in the subsequent procedure. That the system was a sound one and that it gave extremely permanent results seem to be beyond dispute, for despite the vicissitudes to which the Roman wall paintings have been exposed many of them are still in a wonderfully perfect condition.

What Mr. Gambier Parry did was to devise a way of applying wax to the plaster surface, and of mixing it with the colours, without any use of heat for the purpose of solidifying the painting. He chose as a solvent for the wax a volatile oil which would evaporate as the work dried, and would leave the solid substances blended into a uniform mass. The

WALL PAINTING, PALAIS DE ST. PIERRE, LYONS

PUVIS DE CHAVANNES

medium he compounded consisted of four ounces of white wax and two of gum elemi, by weight, and eight ounces of oil of spike and twenty of artist's copal, by liquid measure, which were melted together over a charcoal fire. The method of preparation he adopted was to melt first the two ounces of gum elemi in the same quantity of rectified turpentine, then to add the wax, and when this also was melted to pour into the liquid the twenty ounces of copal, and to boil the whole mixture to a foam, stirring it vigorously so as to thoroughly incorporate all the ingredients. This boiling is done twice, and just before the mixture is taken off the fire for the second time the eight ounces of oil of spike are added to it. As this oil is extremely volatile, it would be lost if it were subjected to the boiling process. The medium, when finished, is poured into glass bottles, and is corked up as soon as it has cooled. It will keep for a long time in perfect condition.

The wall on which the picture is to be painted must be dry, and must have a porous surface. It should be covered with a sound plaster of lime and sand, which must not be treated in any way that would diminish its absorbent quality. So long as the materials are pure and clean any plaster—not cement, which is too hard—will answer well enough when it is laid on properly; and even a coarse grained and porous stone, not plastered over, will serve. A quantity of the medium is then taken and diluted with one-and-a-half times its bulk of turpentine. With this the wall is well soaked, and, after an interval of two days, soaked again. Then, after waiting for a few days to allow the volatile ingredients of this "wall wash" to evaporate, the surface is covered thickly with a priming of powdered white lead and gilder's whitening, mixed to the right consistency with the medium slightly diluted with turpentine. Two coats of this priming are required, and then it must be left for two or three weeks to harden. What results is a pure white ground, firm and yet absorbent, and perfectly suitable for the best type of decorative painting.

All the colours which are to be used in the actual work are taken in dry powder, and mixed with the medium until they are sufficiently fluid to be easily laid on with the brush, and they can then be put into tubes and kept until wanted. In painting they must be applied straightforwardly and without timidity; and the less they are retouched or modified the better will be the appearance of the picture. Before each day's work it is well to wash over with pure oil of spike the ground that is to be painted upon, so as to slightly soften it and prepare it to receive the pigments laid upon it. Free use of the medium is desirable, as it helps to make the surface of the picture harder, and to secure it more firmly to the wall beneath.

The things that must be avoided are any labouring of the brushwork, or any tinkering with parts of the painting which have once been finished. The effect of re-touching is to bring to the top the resinous ingredients in the medium, and to cause shiny patches. The same defect will result from allowing any drops of oil of spike, or turpentine, to fall on the finished work. But if ordinary care is taken the picture will dry with an admirable dead surface, and yet will have no suspicion of chalkiness. The white ground beneath the colours will give them all necessary brilliancy even if they are applied with fair solidity, and it will preserve them from sinking in or dulling with age. Altogether the process has greater advantages and fewer inconveniences than any other which is available for mural decoration. Its technicalities are easily learned, and are not so different from those of ordinary oil painting that they are likely to perplex a conscientious artist who attends to the mechanism of his craft.

Sufficient work has been done in spirit fresco to prove that it really possesses the more important advantages that are claimed for it. Mr. Gambier Parry employed it himself more than forty years ago in Highnam Church, Gloucestershire, and a few years later in Gloucester Cathedral, and his paintings have lasted extremely well. The most notable examples

LUNETTE IN SPIRIT FRESCO, SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM

LORD LEIGHTON, P.R.A.

of its use in secular decoration are to be found at South Kensington—the two large lunettes designed and painted by Lord Leighton in one of the courts of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The first of these, "The Arts of War," has been in existence nearly twenty years, and the second one, "The Arts of Peace," almost as long. Both are interesting as instances of what can be done with a process on a large scale, and when handled by a capable and intelligent painter; and the way in which they have kept their freshness in a building where they are exposed to rather trying atmospheric influences speaks well for the permanence of the method employed.

At the same time there are some instructive warnings to be obtained from studying these lunettes. They are not both treated in exactly the same fashion, so comparisons can be advantageously made between them. In "The Arts of War" the stucco surface was left rather coarse in grain and this excess of granulation has brought about a degree of darkening in the colours because it has allowed dust to cling to the face of the picture, and to lower it generally in tone. In "The Arts of Peace," the plaster is smoother and more even, so the brilliancy of the painting has been better kept and less of the colour effect has been lost. Apart from the darkening caused by dirt, there seem to be no changes in either work. The colours have lasted well, and there is no sign of chemical degeneration, nor is any peeling of the pigments perceptible. The thorough incorporation of the superficial brushwork with the substance of the wall certainly appears to have been secured, and in this important respect the process fulfils its purpose quite adequately.

There are. too, some differences of technical method which distinguish the pictures one from the other. "The Arts of War" is painted in a decisive manner, broadly, and with considerable largeness of handling. The roughness of the plaster seemingly led the artist to work fluently and with much freedom, and to depend upon the blending of his touches in the

wet paint to give him the necessary gradation. The smoother surface of the second lunette tempted him to aim at more minuteness in executing it, and at a more precise manner of statement. The figures are outlined, and the shadows are emphasised by hatching with lines, which are a little too visible. There is more directness in the execution of "The Arts of War," and, as from their position in the Museum both pictures have to be viewed

SPIRIT FRESCO. TOWN HALL, MANCHESTER FORD MADOX BROWN

at rather close quarters, it is the more attractive of the two in its general aspect. Much may be learned about the adaptability of spirit fresco by study of these easily accessible examples.

Ford Madox Brown also followed the Gambier Parry method—with some modifications—in several of the panels which he painted for the decoration of the Manchester Town Hall ; but he avoided the roughness of surface which is open to objection in Lord Leighton's "Arts of War," and chose instead a very smooth stucco ground. In this he was obviously judicious, for the risk of the frescoes becoming darkened by a deposit of dust on every slight projection is even greater in Manchester than in London. Moreover his instinct in Art inclined him to high finish and

delicate treatment of details, both of which would have been made almost impossible by any very decided granulation. His designs were on a much smaller scale than those in the Museum, and he arranged the wall surface to suit them.

Damp is apparently the chief source of danger to the spirit fresco process. It has had no chance of affecting the South Kensington lunettes or the Manchester panels, but a similar painting, also by Lord Leighton, in the parish church at Lyndhurst has suffered much from moisture which has soaked into the wall. But as there is no form of mural decoration on plaster which will bear such an unnecessary test, spirit fresco cannot be blamed for failure from this cause. With reasonable precautions against accident—precautions that always ought to be taken in a building which is to be decorated—it is safe enough.

### Oil Painting on Plaster.

It is distinctly an open question whether the use of oil paint on plaster can be reckoned among legitimate devices. It has the sanction of antiquity, for instances of its use can be found throughout a long series of centuries, but at no time has it been proved to be trustworthy or to be possessed of any lasting qualities. Some of the greater Italians worked in this way, Sebastian del Piombo and Raphael among them. In the Sala de Constantino, in the Vatican, two figures, of "Justice" and "Prudence," are said to have been painted in oils by Raphael himself on a specially-prepared lime ground; and after his death his pupils executed some of his designs in the same manner. Other artists at that period followed the new fashion, and, fascinated by the effectiveness and force of oil colours, tried to treat them as a substitute for fresco and tempera.

In modern times the same attempt has been made by many capable craftsmen. Albert Moore, at the commencement of his career painted

CEILING, FONTAINEBLEAU BOUCHER

some important decorations in oils upon the walls of churches and private houses; and other artists in England and abroad have been indiscreet enough to misuse the medium in this scarcely permissible manner. But almost invariably the results have been disastrous. Admirable designs, handled with great skill, and marked by rare beauties of draughtsmanship and colouring, have quickly decayed, and have become in a few years mere travesties of what they were originally. It would be difficult to find now any works executed in this way within the last half century, which have retained their freshness in even a moderate degree.

As a matter of fact the action of lime upon the chemical substances out

WALL PAINTING
HOTEL RUSSELL
H. C. BREWER

of which most of the oil pigments are made is almost certain to produce changes of the most serious sort. Some colours it bleaches, others it completely alters, and with others again it combines to produce a compound with new properties and an unexpected power to affect everything with which it comes in contact. There is always a risk, also, that the absorbent plaster will draw out of the colours so much of the varnish or oil with which they are mixed, that they will have no longer any adhesive power and will simply crack off the wall as they dry. Even if the wall is sufficiently coated with size to make it non-absorbent, the preservation of the painting is not ensured, for the size, with its liability to be affected by damp and its tendency to encourage fungoid growths, makes an unreliable base for the painting.

Really, it is better to exclude oil painting on plaster from the list of processes available for the decorative painter, despite the many precedents which can be quoted in its favour. It is not sufficiently above suspicion to be accepted as a mode of working adapted for mural pictures which are worthy of permanence. It may, perhaps, be permitted in temporary buildings, like Exhibition galleries, where elaborate decorations have to be quickly carried out and are not expected to last long; it is out of place anywhere else.

### Decorations on Canvas.

As a means of evading the difficulties which are inherent to all the other forms of mural painting, modern artists have adopted a device which does not impose upon them the necessity of learning new technicalities and yet allows sufficient scope for the production of important works. A way has been found to fix canvas to the surface of the wall so as to interpose between the picture and the plaster an impervious stratum which serves as a protective against damp and chemical action, and reduces the risk of the painting peeling away from its base. Before this invention was perfected decorations painted on canvas had frequently been stretched on

WALL PAINTING, LECTURE THEATRE, SOCIETY OF ARTS W. BARRY, R.A.

frames and kept in position either by being nailed to the wall or by being set in panelling. Many instances of this manner of ornamenting rooms could be quoted. It was common enough in France a century and more ago—there are famous ceiling decorations and panels by Fragonard, Boucher, and their contemporaries, which were so treated—and it has often been used in other countries. In England, the pictures by Barry, in the rooms of the Society of Arts, provide a case in point.

At the same time, there were many ways in bygone years of laying a large piece of canvas upon plaster and of keeping it in position safely enough. With proper safeguards, and in buildings where the changes of temperature were not excessive, they have often been quite successful. None of them, however, can be regarded as safe under all possible

WALL PAINTING IN THE SORBONNE, PARIS

PUVIS DE CHAVANNES

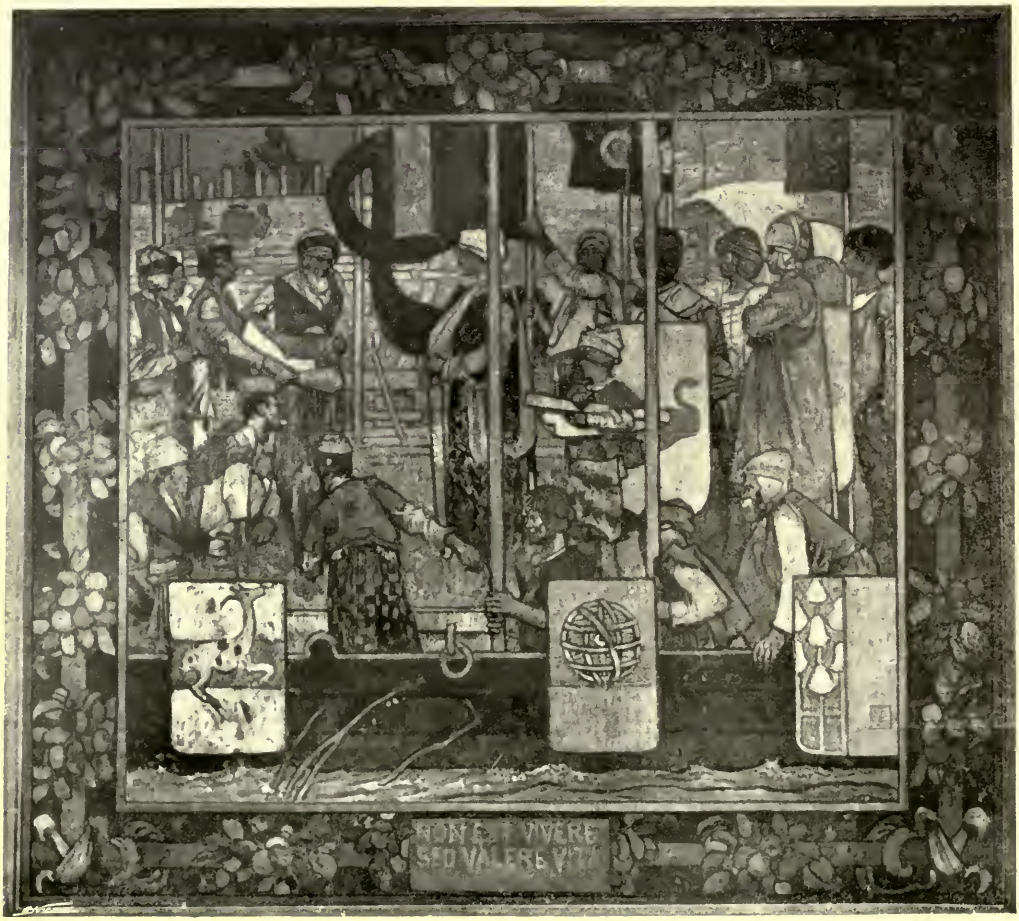
conditions ; and when size was used as the adhesive medium there were particular chances of damage from heat or moisture. It was with the idea of diminishing these chances to the utmost that the contrivance which is now in fashion was perfected. It seems to satisfy all reasonable requirements, and it presents no mechanical difficulties which cannot be overcome with a moderate amount of ingenuity.

So far as the artists themselves are concerned, there is nothing in this form of painting which would trouble anyone who is accustomed to work on a fairly large scale. Ordinary oil paints can be used with any medium which will give a fairly dead surface ; or it is possible to apply the spirit fresco pigments, with some small modifications, to the canvas. Within reasonable limits the most solid handling is permissible, and there are hardly any restrictions upon the variety and strength of the colour scheme which can be followed. There is no obligation to consider the action of lime on the colours, as in fresco, and there is no need to struggle with plaster that has to be kept wet during each day's working. There is no compounding of more or less complicated mediums as in tempera, and the necessity for elaborate preparations which exists in most of the other methods is not present to check absolute freedom of expression. Each man can do whatever suits him best, and can satisfy to the utmost his own preferences in design.

Several great decorative undertakings have been recently put in hand with the assistance of these modern methods of fixing the painting to the wall. There is the important scheme for the Library at Boston, in the United States, which has for some years engaged the attention of a group of famous artists ; there is the adornment of the Royal Exchange, which is now in progress ; and there is quite a number of interesting examples to be found in France and elsewhere. The process, indeed, has been welcomed by decorators as providing an easy way out of a difficulty, as well as a cheap and convenient manner of satisfying the demand of their clients.

Because it seems, too, to promise a considerable degree of permanence there is little hesitation in trusting to it when something important has to be accomplished—something which is to remain for the edification of future generations.

But out of these very facilities and advantages there comes a curious possibility of artistic degeneration. Everything is made so smooth for the painter, and the limitations which he must observe are so few, that there is a distinct danger of his being induced to overstep the bounds of good



DESIGN FOR WALL PAINTING F. BRANGWYN

WALL PAINTING, ROYAL EXCHANGE — LORD LEIGHTON, P.R.A.

WALL PAINTING, ROYAL EXCHANGE — FRANK BRANGWYN

WALL PAINTING ON CANVAS HUGHES STANTON AND TALBOT HUGHES

taste and to run into exaggeration. He may be tempted to forget the need for simplicity and dignity of style, and to seek in his work effects that belong rather to picture painting than pure decoration. To be realistic and minute in the treatment of his subjects is easy, because he is not forced to consider the mechanism of the method and to adapt his expression to its peculiarities. Unless he possesses naturally the purer instinct of the decorator, he will make mistakes which would be scarcely possible under stricter discipline.

As an illustration of the way in which the functions of decorative painting can be mis-conceived the series of panels in the Royal Exchange distinguished by real breadth of treatment and dignity of manner. They have insisted upon trivialities which have no decorative meaning, and have missed the more impressive qualities by which alone the true monumental effect is attainable. The panels are only magnified easel pictures, and not in the best sense decorations at all.

WALL PAINTING ON CANVAS — HUGHES STANTON & TALBOT HUGHES

Perhaps the only exceptions may be instanced. The artists entrusted with these works have been chosen from the men who are prominent among the better known exhibitors in the art galleries, and are without exception leading favourites of the public. But nearly all of them have preferred to paint illustrative pictures, full of little complications of colour and small elaboration of accessories, rather than large, simple designs to this general rule of misapprehension are the two paintings by Lord Leighton and Mr. Brangwyn. Lord Leighton had a sound perception of the functions of design which guided him throughout his life and saved him from any descent into the common-places of actuality. He was emphatically a master of style and a student of great principles, so that it became an inseparable part of his nature to aim at the higher forms of expression. Mr. Brangwyn is by instinct and training a decorator of remarkable resource. He understands, as few other men

WALL PAINTING ON CANVAS — HUGHES STANTON & TALBOT HUGHES

WALL PAINTING, GLASGOW MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS

E. A. WALTON

do, the difference between illustrative painting and that which has to fit in with an architectural scheme, and he will not deny his art for the sake of cheap popularity. Therefore, the panel which he is preparing as an addition to the Royal Exchange series, will take its place worthily beside Lord Leighton's, and put into the shade all the others. It is a

CEILING, HOTEL DE VILLE, PARIS PICARD

mural painting of the right character, and yet it is modern in feeling and wholly personal in its atmosphere.

There are other instances which can be quoted to show how the really great designer will avoid the pit-falls which are fatal to lesser men. The splendid canvases executed by Puvis de Chavannes for the Boston

CEILING PANELS, SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM W. F. BRITTEN

Library and for various public buildings in France, the exquisite "Cupid and Psyche" frieze designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and painted partly by him, and partly by Mr. Walter Crane, in the house of the Earl of Carlisle at Kensington, the works of Mr. E. A. Abbey, and Mr. J. S. Sargent, for the Boston Library, Mr. E. A. Walton's historical composition for the Glasgow Municipal Buildings, and some smaller things like Mr. Britten's ceiling panels in the South Kensington Museum deserve to be praised as true decorations properly conceived and rightly

managed. The "Joan of Arc" series, painted a few years ago by Mr. Hughes Stanton and Mr. Talbot Hughes, is also a satisfactory achievement; and though there is a certain lack of reserve in the florid designs carried out in France by Baudry, Picard, and some other French painters of what may be called the fanciful school, these productions

CEILING PANELS, SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM W. F. BRITTEN

take a prominent position among modern examples because of their technical significance.

Indeed, if the instances of misapplication of this method of working are sifted out, there remains an amount of solid accomplishment sufficient to prove that the artists of our times are acquiring many sound views about the properties of decorative Art, and that, helped by mechanical devices which are easy to understand, they are moving steadily towards a real revival of what is indisputably the greatest and worthiest type of

practice which can engage the painter's attention. Higher standards than obtain in pictorial work are being established, and as soon as the temptation to use recklessly the many facilities of the process has been overcome by study of the best authorities, really admirable results are to be expected. But the necessity for this close study must be fully recognised by all would-be decorators. No man who cannot rise above the littlenesses of the exhibition picture can hope to excel as a mural painter. He must come to his work with big ideas and must abandon all the effective tricks to which he has to descend if he desires to make himself heard in the hurly-burly of the Academy. In decoration he must neither affect cleverness nor pose as an eccentric follower of new fads—such ephemeral devices are out of place in an art which is independent of momentary or local considerations.

A word may be added concerning the manner in which these decorations painted on canvas in the artist's studio are fixed permanently in the place they are designed to occupy. The wall is first plastered solidly and smoothly so as to avoid the possibility of cracking, and to prevent the existence of any superficial irregularities which would spoil the effect of the picture. Then on the plaster surface is laid a stiff mixture of white lead and strong varnish, and on to this preparation the canvas is pressed with rollers or large-bladed steel knives until it firmly adheres in every part. Skilful handling is necessary in this final operation, and great care has to be taken to ensure perfect contact between the back of the picture and the wall. Theoretically the process is an admirable one, for the lead and varnish harden into an impervious mass which holds the canvas firmly, and guards it from damp from behind. The method of fixing is the same whether the picture is painted, like the Royal Exchange panels, in an adaptation of spirit fresco, or, like many of the French decorations, in oil colours with a medium which dries dead.

The weakest point in this manner of wall painting is that the life of

WALL PAINTING, THE EARL OF CARLISLE'S HOUSE — SIR E. BURNE JONES

WALL PAINTING, THE EARL OF CARLISLE'S HOUSE, KENSINGTON — SIR E. BURNE JONES

the picture is determined by the lasting power of the canvas itself. If the material to which the painting is applied begins to decay hardly anything can be done to save it. Relining or backing, as in an ordinary oil painting, is, perhaps, not absolutely impossible, but it would be a very delicate and dangerous operation, and one that would tax the skill of the most experienced restorer. All possible precautions against harm to the canvas must be taken both during the painting of the picture and in laying it upon the wall. With a sufficiency of care it will probably remain intact for centuries, but any carelessness in the mechanism would have disastrous results.

# SECTION II.

## MOSAIC.

One of the most serious rivals to mural painting as the chief of decorative devices is the ancient art of working in mosaic. It satisfies, to a remarkable extent, most of the conditions which must be observed by the decorator, and it has advantages which entitle it to special consideration. It fits particularly well into an architectural scheme, and agrees with the structural features of the building to which it is applied. It is adaptable to a wide range of subjects, allows full scope to the designer, and gives results which are practically for all time. No form of decoration, indeed, is at once so effective and so imperishable; and few are as easily managed.

Yet there cannot be claimed for it all the characteristic qualities of painting. Gorgeous colour effects can be obtained with its assistance, splendid combinations far beyond the reach of ordinary pigments; but it offers no opportunities to the man who delights in masterly brushwork and desires to stamp with his personal touch whatever he produces. In execution it is more or less mechanical, and only in a minor degree does it provide the artist whose designs are being carried out with chances of varying the methods of interpretation. For these reasons it is best suited for those parts of a building which are not capable of very near inspection. Viewed at a moderate distance mosaics are in every way satisfactory; it is only when they are examined too closely that their technical conventions

MOSAIC, CHICAGO EXHIBITION
MURANO COMPANY

seem obvious, and that their surface handling is seen to be unattractive. As they are built up of cubes of coloured material the same suavity of gradation which brushwork will give is, of course, impossible, but when the abruptness of the colour transitions is modified by distance the blending of tone into tone and tint into tint is optically complete enough to make the whole effect pleasing and correct.

Mosaic has a history which commences with the earliest beginnings of civilisation. It was practised extensively by the Egyptians, Assyrians, and other Eastern nations, many centuries before the Christian era; it was in constant use among the Greeks and Romans; and it had a place of great importance among the decorative Arts of the early Christians. There has never been any serious break in its progress, and after being handled by artists of all periods and countries it is to-day an art full of vitality and very widely appreciated. Ample opportunities of studying its ancient characteristics are available for modern men, for the materials employed by mosaic workers have always been so durable that they have remained practically unchanged through hundreds of years.

In one of its forms it provides some of the most familiar evidences of the artistic taste possessed by the Romans. The pavements, which abound wherever this energetic people established colonies and put up buildings of any importance, are often mosaics of very elaborate design and admirable execution. They show that the Roman craftsmen understood perfectly the principles of the art, and could apply them with unfailing ingenuity and resource. In workmanship the more highly finished of these pavements were often extremely beautiful; and as arrangements of colour and expressions of a feeling for the right distribution of the various parts of a pattern they had at times a more than ordinary degree of merit.

The instances of the use of mosaic for wall panels were not frequent among the Romans until in the later days of the Empire, when the art

became popular as a means of church adornment. But then an important school of pictorial mosaic sprang up, with Byzantium as its headquarters, and its influence spread widely in many directions. In Italy especially it was accepted as a valuable addition to the other decorative processes, and in its Byzantine, or rather Roman, form it was freely used up to the eighth or ninth centuries.

That its advantages should have been readily recognised by the artists of the Italian Renaissance is not in any way surprising. A device which lent itself to the production of great colour effects, and was at the same time easy to handle and certain in its results, was not likely to be neglected by the decorators who were striving one against the other in a sincere struggle after superb accomplishment in Art. So it took its place among the technical processes by which these splendid craftsmen gave shape to their ideas, and it served them well in many of their noblest undertakings. In such a building as the Cathedral of St. Mark at Venice, the mosaics, which were continually in progress from the beginning of the twelfth century to the end of the seventeenth, are notable, not only because they summarise most of the stages in the development of the art in Western Europe, but also because they provide a perfect demonstration of its greatest capabilities. The cathedral is one of the most complete decorative efforts to be found in the world, a rare instance of artistic consistency, and it affords an object lesson of infinite value to all students of design.

There have been few changes in the technicalities of mosaic during its long history. The methods which were employed by the Romans, the Byzantines, and the mediæval Italians, are still in use, and are followed, with only minor modifications, by the artists of our times. Variations in style have certainly occurred, marking the period and country in which the art was practised; but these variations have reflected rather the rise and fall of particular phases of taste than any departure from the modes of working

EXECUTED BY MURANO COMPANY

which have been tested and settled by centuries of experience. In every age the skill of the actual executant and the intelligence of the designer have necessarily affected the value of the things produced. Failures have been recorded, and successes; but the principles by which all the workers have been guided have remained the same, and no one has attempted to seriously disregard the teaching of their predecessors.

The whole art of working in mosaic can be defined as a process of piecing together small fragments of coloured substances so as to make a pattern which will be properly effective when seen sufficiently far off. These substances can be of many kinds. They may be stones of different varieties, such as marble or porphyry, or manufactured materials like coloured glass, enamels, china, earthenware, terra cotta, and, indeed, anything which has a definite hue and solidity enough to remain unaltered by ordinary wear and tear. In the Roman pavements marbles of all sorts were generally used, but pieces of tiles, and even chalk were occasionally introduced; and in many of the earlier wall decorations bits of terra cotta and earthenware are frequently to be found.

In more modern times the use of glass cubes, or tesseræ as they are called, has, however, become almost universal in mural work. The glass is specially made in suitable colours and is cut or broken into sizes convenient for handling—into cubes of rather less than an inch for ordinary large decorations, and into much smaller pieces for minute designs. An almost unlimited range of tints can be produced, and, as the glass is coloured right through, the brilliancy of these tints remains unaffected by any weathering of the surface of the tesseræ, and therefore no change is likely to take place in the picture.

The way in which the tesseræ are fixed to the wall varies according to the type of decoration which is to be carried out. In the bolder mosaics, which are placed high up in a large building, the first step is to prepare a full-sized cartoon which is cut into sections. A strong cement is then

laid upon the wall, which has been previously roughened so as to receive it properly, and on to this cement the design is traced from the cartoon. Then the tesseræ are pressed into the cement, which, as it dries, grips them firmly and fixes them securely to the wall. Some judgment on the part of the workpeople engaged is necessary, for they have to follow closely the variations of colour in the cartoon and they must understand how to space the tesseræ so as to hit the mean between excessive roughness and irregularity of execution and that mechanical precision which would make the picture, when finished, hard and lifeless. As the cement dries fairly quickly large wall surfaces have to be covered bit by bit, and only a space which can be dealt with in the time during which the ground remains in a proper condition should be prepared for each day's operations.

When closely examined a mosaic executed in this manner seems strangely incoherent. The tesseræ appear to be stuck into the cement most oddly and inconsequently, and the ground shows freely between them. The face, too, of the picture is uneven; and the whole work has an accidental look which suggests little care in handling. But out of this irregularity there comes a definite advantage. As the tesseræ are set at all kinds of angles there is a play of light on them which makes them sparkle and enhances their brilliancy of colour. They seem to vibrate and to change in effect with every variation in the incidence of the light; and the picture has in consequence a degree of vitality which would be unattainable in any other medium.

Another method of working, which does not necessitate the execution of the mosaic on the spot, is also in frequent use. The cartoon is first of all reversed and transferred so to sheets of strong brown paper. The tesseræ are next placed face downwards upon the paper and fastened to it with paste. The wall is then prepared in the ordinary way with the adhesive cement, and upon this cement the sheet of tesseræ is pressed. As soon

FAÇADE IN MOSAIC, PALAIS HEISER E. GROSSHEIM, COLOGNE

SALVIATI

as the cement has set sufficiently the brown paper is washed off the face of the panel, and the picture is complete. The advantages of this process are that it saves expense, as the mosaics can be prepared in a manufactory and sent, ready for immediate putting up, to any part of the world, that comparatively unskilled workmen can be trusted to copy the cartoon, and that no great amount of supervision need be given to the work by the artist responsible for the design.

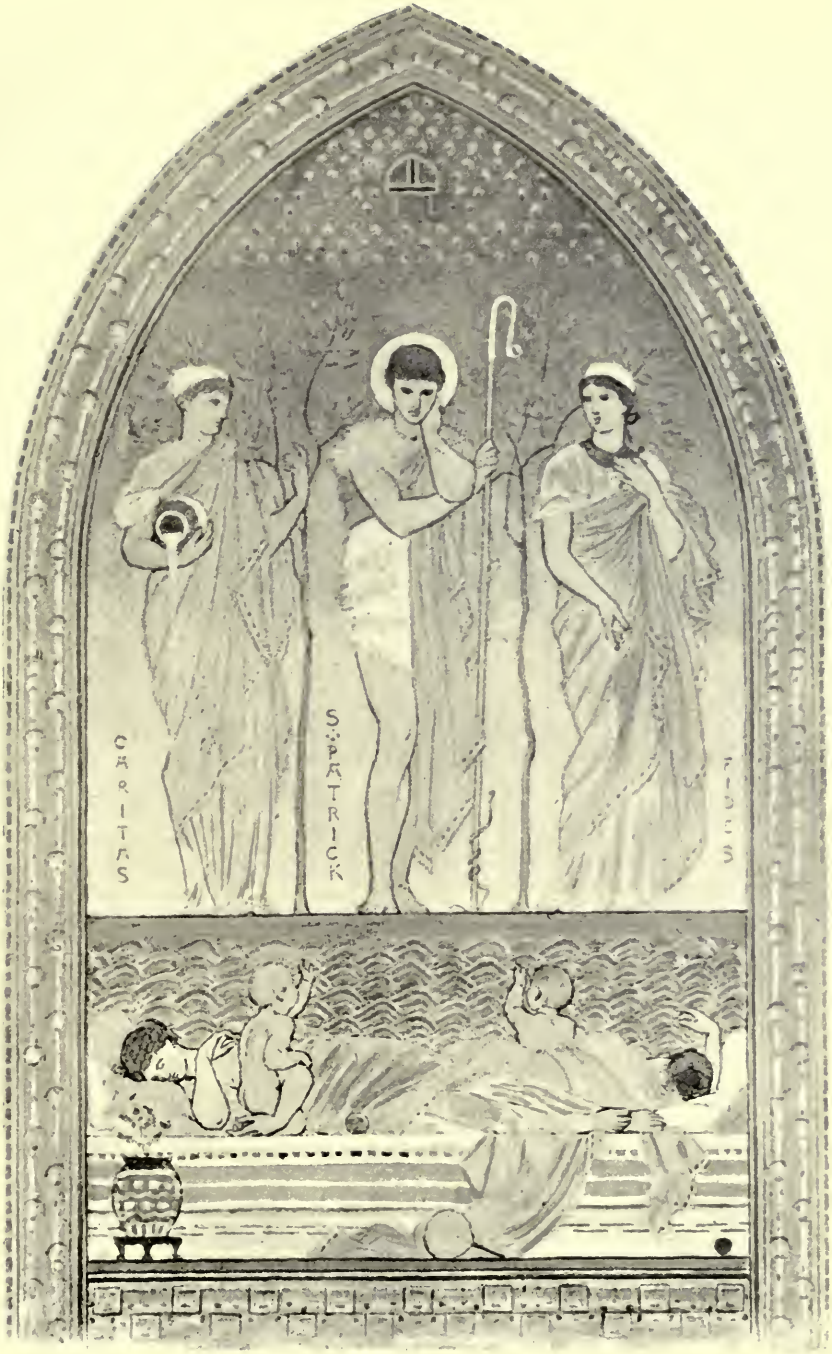
But to balance these advantages a good many objections can be brought against this manner of dealing with mosaics. It does not admit of much spontaneity in execution, and it is not well adapted for those little subtleties of handling which can be introduced, at the discretion of the artist, in mosaics which are built up bit by bit upon the wall. Moreover, nearly all consideration of the local conditions under which the finished work has to be seen is eliminated. The cartoon is practically the only guide the workpeople have, and there is no little danger that they may reproduce it with a mechanical correctness which leads to an absolutely lifeless result. But the greatest objection to the method is that the face of the picture, by being laid upon the sheets of brown paper, is made perfectly level and regular, so that there is no variety of projection in the tesseræ to catch chance gleams of light. This absence of any accidental quality is a serious defect—one, indeed, which takes away one of the chief charms of mosaic, and diminishes its value as a decorative medium applicable to large works.

For it must not be forgotten that a certain formality of style and definiteness of statement are prescribed necessarily by the nature of the materials used. It has been already pointed out that the delicacy of gradation which can be produced by the blending of touches put on with a brush is unattainable. Each spot of colour is an immutable fact, not to be modified by devices of handling; only by clever arrangement of the tesseræ can gradation be suggested. Therefore, anything which emphasises

the formality of the work tends to make it dull and uninteresting, and to assert its mechanical peculiarities at the expense of its artistic merit. Treated with sufficient freedom, and by an artist who does not fear to follow his individual taste, it has immense possibilities, but it shows at once any want of intelligence or adaptability in the craftsmen who have been employed upon it.

The principal thing that must be avoided in mosaic is straining after pictorial effect. Imitations of painting are almost invariably unpleasant and irritating because they have a scrappiness of aspect which calls attention at once to the restrictions under which the work has to be executed. Suggestions of atmospheric subtleties or aerial perspective are hardly practicable; and efforts after realistic treatment of detail lead usually to commonplace and often vulgar results. The art is absolutely one for the colourist who can take a large view of design and prove his independence of the popular craving for pretty actualities. Everything which tends to encourage excursions into fields of Art where mosaic must inevitably be at a disadvantage when compared with other mediums ought to be strenuously discouraged. There are so many standard examples which show what it can do, and cannot do, that mistakes in the application of it now are scarcely excusable.

Although through the course of centuries it has been accepted as particularly fitted for the decoration of churches and ecclesiastical buildings there are in all ages many instances of its use as an adjunct to domestic architecture. In modern times these instances have been numerous enough to suggest that only a little ingenuity on the part of the designers is needed to establish mosaic as one of the best recognised means of adornment which the architect has at his disposal. It is chiefly to that curious fear of colour which is characteristic of the average Englishman that the past unpopularity of the art in this country can be ascribed. But now that a certain number of artists have set




CARTOON FOR MOSAIC

ALBERT MOORE

LUNETTE IN MOSAIC EXECUTED BY SALVIATI

themselves to prove to us that colour can be introduced into private houses and public buildings without dangerous consequences, we may hope to find this method of decoration as much in request here as it is abroad. In Italy and France mosaic has always had its place among the reliable devices for inside and outside use, and it has never been limited to churches only as it was in England until quite recently.

Probably the reason for this limitation is to be sought in the fact that practically all the older examples of the art which we possess were executed abroad or by foreign workpeople imported for the purpose. There was in past years no school of English mosaists who could express the native feeling in design and produce things which would agree with local conditions. Whatever has been done has assumed an exotic quality out of keeping with its surroundings, and therefore discordant. That under such conditions it should be unacceptable is not surprising. Its want of fitness caused it to be discredited, and for a long time led our artists to avoid the study of its possibilities because they neither saw how they could

break away from the foreign tradition, nor, if they did, how they could ensure their intentions being understood and respected by the foreign workmen who would have to be called in to carry out the designs.

This want of study is very apparent in the few works which were attempted in England during the middle of the Victorian era. In most of them one of the two commonest faults is always present, and sometimes both are combined. Either the designs were spoiled by the translation into mosaic, or the artists aimed at effects which could not be considered suited to the medium. In the spandrels under the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral there is a characteristic illustration of the first defect. Great monumental drawings, full of splendid possibilities have been made ponderous and empty by a flatness of treatment which, however well suited to the sunny climate of Italy, could never seem anything but dully mechanical in the gloomy atmosphere of London. Large surfaces of mosaic, handled in this lifeless manner, are little suited to the requirements of this country, and the best intentions of the designers could not fail to be obscured by such a mode of interpretation.

The second defect appears in the panels which have been placed in the Central Hall of the Houses of Parliament. Here, with the idea, perhaps, of avoiding flatness of effect, the drawings have been prepared with an excessive inclination towards pictorial suggestion. Realistic modelling, definite statement of minor details, and small varieties of tone gradation, have been freely employed with little discrimination, and the panels are, in consequence, compromises of a not very agreeable kind. They are neither pictures nor true mosaics; they miss the virtues of both, and have no distinctive character which would entitle them to commendation as successful technical achievements. The fault in this case arises from a misunderstanding of the limitations of the process, and from a desire to use it as a substitute for painting.

It is a matter for regret that the existing designs by Albert Moore for

LUNETTE IN MOSAIC

MURANO COMPANY

some of the Central Hall panels should not have been carried out. His remarkable decorative instinct is perfectly exemplified in these drawings, which are in the possession of the Board of Works; and his just appreciation of the possibilities of mosaic gives them a particular value as illustrations of the manner in which it should be treated. The pictorial quality has been carefully avoided, and any weakening of the main facts of the design by exaggeration of unimportant accessories has been guarded against with the shrewdest insight. He did not forget that such works need to be, above all, surface decorations with an architectural character which makes them inherently part of the building in which they are placed; therefore he maintained a judicious reserve and aimed at largeness of line and strict simplicity in the arrangement of masses. He kept his colour, too, quiet and delicate, with just enough brilliancy to make it tell in a rather dark interior, but with no over-elaboration which would diminish its dignity. Perhaps it is not too late even now to plead for the execution of these works; the designs are so complete that to make full-sized cartoons from them would be an easy matter, and Albert Moore's intentions are so clearly expressed in them that no intelligent craftsman would be in doubt concerning the correct method of translation. As object lessons for the guidance of modern workers in mosaic they would be invaluable.

Another series of interior decorations, which show passably the best side of what may be termed pictorial mosaic, is to be found in one of the courts of the South Kensington Museum. This series consists of a number of single figures—portraits of famous artists—on a plain gold ground. They are smooth in surface and fairly minute in handling; but, though they lack, perhaps, much distinction of style, they are not ineffective. The designs for them were provided by painters of note in this country, Lord Leighton, Sir E. J. Poynter, Richard Burchett, Edward Armitage, V. C. Prinsep, and W. F. Yeames, among them;

and the execution of the panels was entrusted to various firms in England and abroad. In a few cases the tesseræ employed were of English manufacture, but they mostly came either from Russia or from the Venetian manufactories of the Murano Company, and Salviati, which are famous for work of this class. These panels belong to a period when mosaic was just beginning to gain a footing in this country, so they have historically a claim to special note. Since the date at which they were put up the number of similar decorations has been considerably increased, and now the art they represent may be regarded as having really taken root in England.

The examples of its introduction in external work are less numerous here than they are abroad, possibly because few of our buildings are adapted for such adornments. But where it has been used the effect has been by no means unsatisfactory. The Albert Memorial is a notable case in point. Florid and exaggerated in style it certainly is; but the mosaics, which give it a touch of sumptuous colouring, are in better taste than most of its other details, and they are handled with the right kind of breadth and decision. They occupy the pediments and the spandrels on each face of the Memorial. Each pediment contains an allegorical figure, and the spandrels are filled with other figures, all of which are set in a gold ground, which defines them strongly, and makes them sufficiently visible despite their height above the ground.

Much less conventional in character, and for that reason of far greater interest, is the panel which forms the central feature of the elevation of the Horniman Museum. The architect of this building, Mr. C. Harrison Townsend, with a wise appreciation of the value of colour, made this panel as it were the focus of his design. The cartoon for the mosaic was prepared by Mr. R. Anning Bell, and the execution entrusted to Mr. George Bridge, one of the chief of the modern English mosaists. As the work stands now, in its completed form, it is especially important as from

MOSAIC PANELS SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM

SIR E. J. POYNTER, P.R.A., & LORD LEIGHTON, P.R.A.

MOSAIC FRIEZE, HORNIMAN MUSEUM R. ANNING BELL

beginning to end a piece of native production with all the characteristics of our most advanced decorative school. It breaks away from tradition in many ways. In its colour treatment, its management of lines and spaces, its technical method, it is unusual and original. The scheme followed is one of greys, browns, and pale red, lighted by the free use of creamy white, and relieved by a few touches of warm green. The gold background is abandoned, and the whole effect is kept studiously simple and reserved. But, despite its austerity, the design is by no means wanting in elegance and freedom, and it is carefully thought out in every detail.

The fact that things on so large a scale can now be produced in this country is very significant of the progress which working in mosaic has made amongst us during the last few years; and when it is remembered, in addition, that Sir W. B. Richmond's decorations in St. Paul's Cathedral are also being carried through without foreign assistance, there seems every reason to hope that the art has at last established itself here with good prospects of success. So long as the necessity remained for seeking in other countries, not only the materials for the work, but also the craftsmen who execute it, the chance that our designers would do themselves real credit was more or less remote. But now they should be able to gain that insight into the technicalities of mosaic which makes

for excellence in practice; and the better the understanding they show the greater will be the demand for their services.

Everything, indeed, which encourages the popularity of English mosaic is to the interest of our artists. The process is one which is peculiarly suited to a climate which tests severely, and perhaps unfairly, all other kinds of mural decoration. It has in the highest degree the quality of permanence, for the materials are practically imperishable; and although the limits within which it can be properly applied are definite enough, there is within them plenty of scope for legitimate ingenuity, and for the exercise of a spirit of invention. Moreover, no

MOSAIC FIRE BACK AND HEARTH

DESIGNED AND WORKED BY MR. & MRS. G. BRIDGE

MOSAIC PANEL MR. & MRS. G. BRIDGE

other process will allow such richness of colour combination, and such sumptuousness of effect, without verging dangerously on vulgarity, and none can be at the same time so strong and so delicate. The fact that it is not well suited for purely pictorial works is scarcely a disadvantage; its intractability in this direction helps the designers to aim at sturdy dignity of manner, and to avoid the trivialities of method which diminish the merit of many wall paintings—for instance of most of the panels in the Royal Exchange, and of much of the modern decorative work in France. In mosaic the effort to be pretty and flippantly realistic brings with it such obvious disaster that no moderately intelligent designer, and no looker-on who is endowed with average good taste, could remain for an instant in doubt concerning the nature of the mistake which had been committed.

There are other applications of mosaic possible besides those in which it is used for the interpretation of figure compositions and definite patterns. It can be introduced in various ways to enhance an architectural effect, as a background to a marble relief, a device not uncommon in Italy, or simply to relieve by a few touches of colour the plainness of large surfaces. It is applicable to walls and ceilings, and

indeed to any part of a building where decoration is appropriate, and its lustrous surface will light up even dark corners in which painted ornament would be almost invisible. On a sound wall, and with a properly compounded cement to hold the tesseræ in place, it will remain solid and unchanged for centuries, for damp does not affect it, and there is no chemical action which can destroy its brilliancy or alter the nature of its constituents.

CARVED STONE CHIMNEYPIECE

ERNEST GEORGE & YEATES

## SECTION III.

### SCULPTURE.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the most appropriate use which can be made of sculpture in any material is to apply it to the purposes of decoration. The ideal statue designed without reference to particular surroundings may be exquisite in conception and perfect in execution, yet without a proper setting it will never be entirely satisfactory in effect. In any ordinary situation it is a cold bare object which assorts ill enough with the every-day commonplaces about it. Out of doors it looks uncomfortable and unnatural, and as if it had got there by accident; indoors it puts everything else out of scale and out of tone, and tells less as a thing of beauty than as an empty patch waiting to be filled with something substantial.

Indeed, the only form of ideal sculpture which can possibly be tolerated in a room is the statuette. This, by its smallness of scale and delicacy of detail, takes its place among the other movable ornaments which fit into odd corners. It is always a pleasant possession, something which will give delight to the collector of artistic trifles; but in the true sense of the word it cannot be regarded as a piece of decoration, because it is independent and does not necessarily form part of any set scheme. Its very success as a domestic accessory emphasises the unwisdom of the effort to treat larger works in the same haphazard way, and to adapt them to uses for which they are unfitted.

Obviously then, if sculpture needs a special setting to make it

effective, its best chance of showing its finer qualities will come from combination with architecture. Work which is carved in marble or stone, cast in bronze, or modelled in terra cotta, is always valuable as a means of ornamenting a building of any importance, and the better treated it is the more adequately does it fulfil its decorative mission. It gains in dignity by its situation, and in interest by the fact that it has been designed with a special intention. It acquires, indeed, a far more convincing reason for existence than the abstract illustrations of the sculptor's skill can ever be held to possess.

Yet in quite recent times, artists were afflicted with a kind of false pride which made them despise architectural sculpture as something beneath their dignity; they had a way of talking of it as an inferior class of Art, which was unfit to be touched by any man who wished to be considered worthy of an honourable rank in his profession. Consequently it fell into the hands of the mechanical carver employed by firms who provided ornamentation for buildings at so much a square yard. It was classed as stonemason's work, and if a young artist was injudicious enough to break away from the general custom, and to make experiments in the application of sculpture to practical purposes, he was treated as altogether outside the pale of respectability. So long as he contented himself with things which could be stuck on a pedestal, with conventional Venuses and namby-pamby Apollos, or with statues of successful City men and prominent generals, he was regarded as one of the elect; but if he was once discovered doing something which could not stand in solitary grandeur at a street corner his prospects were certain to suffer.

This ridiculous misapprehension, however, brought its own punishment. A few years ago, when, as it happened, classic gods and goddesses had gone out of fashion, and there were not quite so many famous moderns as there had been half a century before waiting to be immortalised, sculptors fell on evil days. They found themselves neglected, and they began to

CARVED STONE CHIMNEYPIECE, CASTLE HOWARD

suffer for want of support. So they were forced to pocket their pride, and, in the face of all their earlier traditions, they were obliged to enter into competition with the stonemasons whom they had so long looked down upon. Necessity, with its habitual indifference to rules and regulations, taught them to consider professional questions with a breadth of mind that they had not attempted to cultivate before, and the pedantry which had denied to them their best opportunities vanished completely.

The advantage which has come from this change of attitude can scarcely be over-estimated. In the last twenty years there has grown up a development of sculpture which promises to give results such as have not been seen since the great artists of the Italian Renaissance revived many of the glories of classic times. Now we find a host of young sculptors who are extremely well versed in all the details of their craft, and are ready and willing to apply their knowledge to any kind of work which will give them scope for exercising their ingenuity in design and their skill in execution. They do not despise any opportunities, because they know that they can justify themselves by the manner in which they turn to account every chance that comes. They value their originality and they see that it can be better displayed in directions that have been only recently opened up than in the conventional ways which satisfied a previous generation.

Moreover, there must be attributed to the widening of the sculptor's field of practice a quite appreciable improvement in the methods of the artists themselves. The more ample training in decorative principles which is enjoyed by the modern men enables them to treat ideal subjects with an amount of freshness and power which was hardly ever attained by their predecessors of half a century ago. There is a very pleasant difference between the statues which used to be thought worthy of public acceptance and those which are now being produced. The old matter-of-fact, realistic things have given way to fine examples of intelligent design,

cultivated in style, and marked by that dignity which arises especially from the correct appreciation of artistic exigencies. The idea that the only alternatives in sculpture were imitative exactness, or a formula in which nature played a minor part, has been replaced by a much more wholesome conviction about the importance of study and selection; and that this is due to the better sense of their responsibilities which is now influencing all Art workers in England and abroad, seems scarcely to be questioned.

### Sculpture in Marble and Stone.

After all, this revival of the decorative intention in sculpture is only in accordance with the best precedents. In the ancient history of the Art, examples of the application of the work of the greatest artists to the adornment of buildings are extremely numerous. Egypt, Assyria, and Greece provide most convincing illustrations of the manner in which exquisite accomplishment was considered essential in architectural carvings. No carelessness of execution, no rough and ready methods, were permitted to the men who worked in collaboration with the architects of the pre-Christian era. They had to give the best of which they were capable, and, if we may judge by the remains which have been handed down to us, they were earnest enough in their acceptance of the duty imposed upon them.

Certainly there is an almost infallible perception of what decorative carving should be in the marvellous bas-reliefs which have been saved from the wreck of the Assyrian cities. Nowhere else in the world can anything be found to surpass this most delicate form of sculpture. Its technical perfection, its beauty of design, its individuality, and its discriminating expression of the facts observed in Nature make it a standard against which the Art of other nations can be measured. Even the Greeks, with all their mastery over technical processes, cannot be said

SCULPTURED PANEL — ALFRED DRURY, A.R.A.

to have gone further than the Assyrians. They had another standpoint and a different taste; their convention was not so rigid, and their respect for natural authorities was more frankly stated. But as decorators they did not do more than rival the men of Nineveh who interpreted so perfectly the artistic creed of their time and country.

This comparison, however, must not be taken as implying any hint of disloyalty to the Greeks as the origin of all that is best and noblest in European Art. The Parthenon sculptures have been for generations the source of artistic inspiration for all civilised nations—one, indeed, which has never since been equalled. They have, in an emphatic degree, the qualities which appeal most to the modern worker. They follow Nature more closely than the Nineveh reliefs; but at the same time they are restrained by the acutest judgment and by an absolute comprehension of the relation which realism should bear to Art. Above everything, they show a beauty of execution which only the craftsmen who have every mechanical detail of their work under exact control can hope to reach. Every touch has a meaning, because it was directed by human understanding which was influenced by high ideals and educated by study of the best types which were to be found in Nature. The training of the Greek sculptors was balanced and thorough in method. It developed at the same time power of observation and skill in handling, and it kept these two vital elements in the formation of an instinctive style from ever being separated.

It is fairly easy to understand why no later school of sculpture should have been able to approach the Greeks in this combination of qualities. Probably the conditions of life and thought which existed in classic times had an effect upon the intentions of the artists which was not reproducible because these conditions could not be re-created. The work of Michael Angelo and his contemporaries was great in conception and masterly in execution, but it had neither the purity of manner nor the splendid reserve

which distinguish antique Art. During the period when the greatest Italian artists flourished society was in a restless state, and a love of luxury and display pervaded all classes of the people. Naturally, the workers themselves were affected by their surroundings. They had in greater or less degree to reflect the feeling of the moment; and it became impossible for them to keep aloof from the turmoil about them sufficiently long to develop the quality of repose.

SCULPTURED PANEL
ST. GEORGE'S HALL, LIVERPOOL

T. STIRLING LEE
*Photo, Priestly, Liverpool*

Similar causes are in operation to an even larger extent at the present day. Few art workers are able to give undivided attention to the crafts they follow, for success in their profession depends only partially upon the merit of what they produce. They have to consider the nature of the demand which has to be supplied, and they have to enter into competition with their fellows so as to secure a fair share of the commissions which are available. Everything has to be done at high

pressure and against time; and the man who tries to concentrate his whole mind upon the work he has in hand is apt to be elbowed out by more business-like rivals. The struggle for a living is too keen for quiet contemplation, too commercial to permit sacrifices for the sake of ideals. Even an artist, who was endowed with a full measure of the Greek enthusiasm and technical capacity, would have to fall in with modern views or submit to be ignored. He would be too precise, too plodding, for the people about him; and if he gained any credit at all it would be qualified by criticisms on his impracticability and want of business instincts.

But, although it seems impossible, for want of the right environment, to reconstruct now the antique Art with its perfection of balance and singleness of aim, we have many reasons to be satisfied with the progress which sculpture is making, despite the conditions under which present-day men have

SCULPTURED PANEL
ST. GEORGE'S HALL, LIVERPOOL

T. STIRLING LEE
*Photo, Priestly, Liverpool*

to work. Already the list of notable decorative carvings in marble or stone which ornament recent buildings has reached quite respectable proportions. In most of the larger Continental cities, and especially in Paris and the chief of the French provincial towns, evidences of the close alliance between the sculptor and the architect are to be found in all directions; and in England the extent of the awakening is beyond dispute. We have amongst us men like Mr. Alfred Gilbert, Mr. Brock, Mr. Pomeroy, Mr. Alfred Drury, Mr. Stirling Lee, Mr. Colton, Mr. Derwent Wood, Mr. G. J. Frampton, Mr. Pegram, Mr. Goscombe John, and Mr. Thornycroft, who are every year adding things of great value to the sum total of contemporary Art. These artists, with others of similar inspiration, are doing their best to restore sculpture to its right place among the forms of artistic expression, and are renewing its vitality by substituting intelligence of contrivance for unpractical idealism.

MODELLED DESIGN FOR CARYATIDES — ALFRED DRURY, A.R.A.

So far the best chances which have come to the

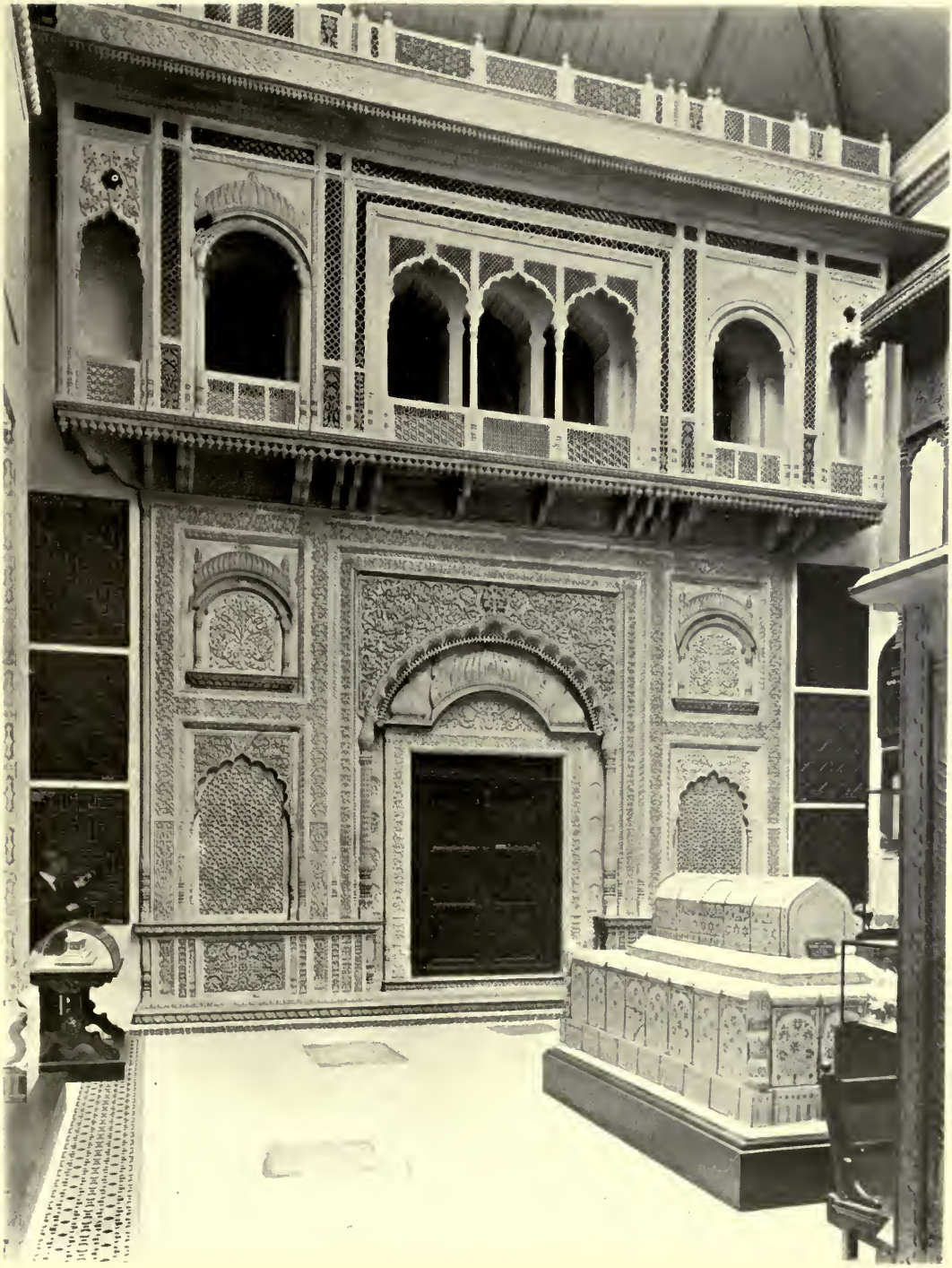
modern sculptor have been in connection with ecclesiastical architecture. A great deal of good work has been required by architects responsible for the restoration of old churches and cathedrals, and for the erection of new buildings of the same order; and many tombs and memorials have been carried out by artists of well-proved capacity. But the desire for appropriate ornamentation in domestic buildings is growing fast. Its effects are seen in the care which is taken now to avoid the inartistic and clumsy treatment of details which passed muster in previous generations. Such productions as those of Mr. G. J. Frampton at Glasgow, Mr. Stirling Lee in the St. George's Hall at Liverpool, or Mr. Drury's caryatides for the offices of the British India Steam Navigation Co., in the City, show that architects are alive to the necessity for calling in the assistance of men with imagination and sound executive skill to make complete ambitious designs. The mechanical carving of the stonemason working to a set pattern does not satisfy the better taste of the present day.

MODELLED DESIGN FOR CARYATIDES — ALFRED DRURY, A.R.A.

Something sounder and more original is demanded; and the readiness of our greater sculptors to meet this demand has smoothed the way to legitimate developments of a notable kind.

Perhaps the most hopeful sign of all that the revival affords is to be found in the character of the architectural sculpture which is being produced now. There has been no surrender of essential principles of design, and no denial of the greater artistic truths. The art has not been weakened so as to adapt it to inferior purposes; rather has it gained in strength and variety. It has shed many of its earlier conventions and has become more liberal in its aims, but at the same time it keeps touch with the traditions which underlie all that is most worthy of attention in the accomplishment of the artists of past centuries. In this way its chances of permanent re-establishment are greatly increased. An absolute uprooting of everything that had gone before might have led to uncertainty and want of confidence, for it would have left no standard against which new things could be measured; but by thoughtful separation of the fundamental canons of Art, which exist for all time, from the temporary mannerisms which mark the influence of passing fashions, the continuity of artistic progress is preserved, and the work of each generation can be estimated at its right value.

A good idea of the way in which a sound tradition can be maintained in decoration without becoming mechanical is to be obtained from study of Eastern art. In India, especially, the intention of the native sculpture has remained unchanged for many centuries, and is to-day—so far as opportunities will allow—as definite as it was in those remote periods when the famous palaces and temples, which still exist in many parts of the country, were erected. The style is one peculiarly adapted to a tropical climate. In the bright Indian sunlight the profusion of delicate detail and the shallowness of relief, give an effect of light and shade which is rich and yet not over-elaborate; and in the dry air the minute finish



FAÇADE IN CARVED STONE, FROM BULANDSHAHR

INDIA MUSEUM

of the carving does not suffer that rapid deterioration which would be inevitable in our atmosphere. As the local conditions which led to the formation of the style still continue, its particular features have required little modification. It cannot, perhaps, be said to have advanced, but at the same time, it has not sunk into merely formal and thoughtless imitation of its earlier self. There is plenty of life in it which needs only the stimulus of a new demand to grow afresh and to renew all the old characteristics in their fullest vigour.

### Terra-Cotta.

That this same inclination to fit methods of handling to the requirements of the moment, and to suit a style to its surroundings, is as active as ever can hardly be questioned. It is seen especially in the readiness of the modern worker to turn to account those technical processes which will help him to realise his artistic fancies in the most appropriate manner. He does not insist upon limitations, which, however right they may have been in the past, are now not only needless but even disadvantageous. By preference he goes outside the bounds which were laid down by men who studied their own period as closely as he does that in which he finds himself; and if he can enlarge the scope of his art fairly and legitimately he has no hesitation in adopting devices hitherto untried.

To the sincerity of this desire for greater technical facility is due the substitution of terra-cotta for carving in marble or stone in many recent buildings. The use of baked clay for artistic purposes is by no means a new thing. Nearly all the ancient nations have left ample evidences that they appreciated its suitability for many kinds of delicate work; and the Greeks and Italians especially handled it with exquisite understanding of its best qualities. But its advantages as an adjunct to architecture have been more fully recognised during the last few years than at any previous period,

and more, perhaps, in this country than in any other. The reason for this is that terra-cotta, by its convenient adaptability and its indestructibility is superior to any other medium for external ornamentation. It can be prepared quickly and easily by any artist who is accustomed to modelling in clay, and therefore the use of it saves time. When properly baked it has a surface which is hard and impervious enough to resist weathering, so that it does not run the risks of disintegration to which carvings in marble or stone are exposed. It is, in fact, the handiest and most unchangeable of building materials, and in many respects the one which meets best the modern demand.

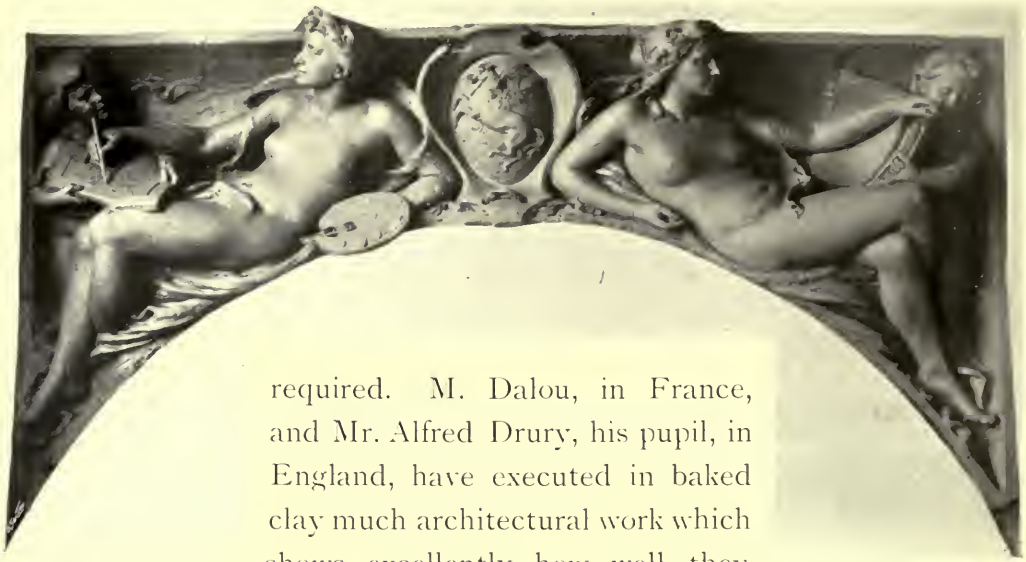
The instances of its employment on a large scale in bygone centuries are plentiful. With it the Greeks faced many of their more important buildings; the Romans used it for friezes and other architectural details—even for columns; it was common in France and Spain as long ago as the sixteenth century; and about the same date English architects introduced it freely in domestic work, though it is possible that they imported much of their terra-cotta from the Low Countries. During the last fifty years, however, it has come very much into vogue in London and the chief provincial towns of England. It has been largely manufactured by the Doultons and other firms, and quite an array of designers have studied its possibilities, and have helped to improve the character of the decorations for which it has been adopted.

One of the most complete examples of building in terra-cotta is the Natural History Museum, at South Kensington, designed by Mr. A. Waterhouse. The exterior especially, with its wealth of detail and profusion of ornament of various kinds, shows instructively how far the management of the material can be carried. In the Victoria and Albert Museum also, and the Albert Hall, it is combined successfully with brickwork, and serves as an admirable substitute for stone. This combination, indeed, has become latterly an extremely usual one. Many

architects like Mr. Colcutt, Mr. Ernest George, and others who are at the head of the modern movement, depend largely upon terra-cotta to give that richness of ornamentation and that play of colour which are vital characteristics of the style that they affect. They usually prepare special designs for the terra-cotta, which are carried out by the manufacturers in accordance with the working drawings provided.

But when the details to be introduced into the building are of exceptional importance, and are too complicated to be safely left to the mould-makers in a factory, the services of an artist of repute are often

WINGED LION IN TERRA COTTA ALFRED DRURY, A.R.A.



TERRA COTTA SPANDREL

ALFRED DRURY, A.R.A.

required. M. Dalou, in France, and Mr. Alfred Drury, his pupil, in England, have executed in baked clay much architectural work which shows excellently how well they understand the possibilities of the material; and Mr. Tinworth has used it with commendable ingenuity in a considerable series of well imagined designs. The majority of Mr. Tinworth's productions have been intended for ecclesiastical buildings, but Mr. Drury has found some of his best opportunities in secular architecture. There are by him some winged lions in the front of a hotel facing Kensington Gardens, and some spandrels with figures in high relief introduced into the elevation of a carriage factory at Hammersmith, which may be taken as typical of the results attainable by a man who knows thoroughly what are the technicalities which must be observed in this class of modelling.

These technicalities, however, are not so complicated that they cannot be mastered with a comparatively small amount of study. The clay has to be prepared with some care, as it has to be combined with powdered silica in the right proportion, and mixed until the whole mass is homogeneous throughout. When moulds are used, as they generally are

for manufactured terra cotta, precautions must be taken to prevent loss of delicacy or sharpness in the ornament; and the risk of warping or twisting in the baking must be guarded against. In modelling large figures the artist has to consider the possibility of shrinkage, and must know how to build up the clay so as to avoid distortion. But if these preliminaries are sufficiently attended to there is little fear of failure. The firing makes the whole thing solid and hard in texture and gives it a semi-glazed surface which resists the effects of the weather and does not darken even in a smoky and dirt-laden atmosphere. The colour, too, which the clay takes when baked is agreeable and permanent, so that there are opportunities for the architect to devise some pleasant contrasts and combinations. Taking it from all points of view, terra-cotta can be called an ideal material for the decoration of buildings where the atmospheric conditions, or exposure to changes of temperature, would quickly harm carvings in any kind of stone. It is in growing request, and as new and improved methods of treating it are being constantly devised its range of usefulness is steadily becoming wider.

### Bronze Castings.

It is, perhaps, questionable whether modelled work in bronze or other metals can be included among the accepted forms of mural decoration. Generally it is used for accessories which do not form part of the structure of a building, for details which are separable from the main design. The most familiar instances of its application are to be found in monuments where it is combined with stone or marble. In this country the conventional memorial is a bronze statue set upon a stone pedestal; but abroad the treatment of such works is more intelligent, and clever architectural designs in which bronze panels or medallions are made essential parts of the decorative scheme are not uncommon.

However, some modern sculptors are beginning to appreciate the value

of bronze reliefs for filling spaces which are susceptible of decoration inside or outside a building, and there are already a few examples, which can be quoted, of more or less successful efforts to substitute works in metal for the more accustomed adornments which have hitherto been considered desirable. There is a shop at Kensington which has in its entrance vestibule a pair of bronze panels admirably executed in low relief and in every way fitted to ornament a place where more fragile work would have been exposed to great risk of damage. In several private houses, too, such panels have been introduced in the pediments over doors, in mantelpieces, and in other situations which called for discreet and undemonstrative treatment. Mr. Reynolds Stephens and Mr. Pomeroy have occupied themselves with sculpture of this class, and have proved that no surrender of the finer technical qualities is needed in carrying it out. It has afforded them opportunities of exercising their artistic faculties to the utmost, and has enabled them to do full justice to their powers.

Whether or not bronze is suited for external decoration is a point which circumstances must decide. In London, at all events, it loses its beauty of colour and becomes black and dingy. The acids in the air corrode its surface and cause a roughness of texture which allows dirt to cling to it. Consequently the golden sheen which is one of the charms of a new casting soon disappears, and the contrast between the darkened metal and the stone in which it is set is, after a while, too violent to be pleasant. In a purer atmosphere it has more chance of developing the patina which comes from gentle weathering, and as it ages it gains a certain play of irridescent colour which is often extremely fascinating. Indoors, however, the change in its surface is not so sudden, nor is it so excessive; and if it is not exposed to the chemical fumes of gas it will keep its original beauty for a comparatively long period. Certainly it is reliable enough under the right conditions, and it has for the artist many merits as a medium in which he can express himself with confidence and discrimination.

PORTION OF BRONZE PANEL
*Copyright, W. Reynolds Stephens*

W. REYNOLDS STEPHENS
*Photo—W E. Gray, Queen's Road, Bayswater*

## Combinations of Metals with other Materials.

Some of the happiest effects in decorative metal working are obtained by the combination of various substances so as to make harmonious arrangements of colour. Many of our best craftsmen have occupied themselves with this delicate form of production. Men like Mr. Alfred Gilbert, Mr. Reynolds Stephens, Mr. G. J. Frampton, and the late Harry Bates have designed and executed works which go near to rival the famous examples of the crafts of the Middle Ages. Mr. Gilbert especially has employed this method in large undertakings, and has achieved results of monumental importance. He has put together bronzes of different colours, aluminium, and other metals, contrasting colours and textures with very correct judgment, and he has planned complicated harmonies with well-balanced ingenuity. Mr. Reynolds Stephens, too, and Mr. Frampton have shown that they have an exquisite perception of the refinements of metal working and an intimate acquaintance with the mechanism by which the most satisfactory achievements can be secured.

IRON AND COPPER PANEL — DESIGNED BY H. GRANVILLE FELL

But as a decorative effort, and as one of the most interesting demonstrations of the possibilities of combination, a piece of work shown by Mr. F. Lynn Jenkins, in the recent exhibition of the Royal Academy, deserves to be specially noted. In this—a frieze for internal decoration—ivory and mother-of-pearl are used in association with bronze which has been coloured by the use of acids. The frieze consists of figures linked together with boldly-treated conventional ornament, the heads and flesh surfaces generally are in carved ivory, and mother-of-pearl and brilliantly coloured shell are introduced by way of background to the figures. The effect of this union of different materials is gorgeous without being overdone; the relation of the colour areas is carefully judged, and the colours themselves are pleasant. The somewhat florid design, with its strength of line and richness of modelled forms, is well fitted for such an overlaying of detail, and lends itself well to exceptional elaboration. The whole thing, in fact, calls for attention, because it reflects significantly the readiness of the younger school of decorators to break new ground, and to seek fresh modes of solving the stock problems of designing. No man who is content to keep strictly to the beaten track would have the courage for such attempts. They demand originality of intention, as well as sound knowledge of technical devices.

Obviously, things as daintily handled as this frieze, and made of materials so dissimilar in character, must be limited in their application. They can only be placed where they are well protected from ordinary risks, and therefore they must be kept under cover and out of reach of accidental damage. But as interior adornments they excellently fulfil their purpose; and as they are open to almost any kind of treatment which suits the fancy of the artist, they can be adapted to fit any scheme of decoration. In this sense their limitations are few enough. A form of Art which encourages contrivance and points the way to endless varieties of invention, and at the same time develops the skill of the executant,

PORTION OF FRIEZE
IN BRONZE, IVORY AND MOTHER-OF-PEARL

F. L. JENKINS

PORTION OF FRIEZE
IN BRONZE, IVORY AND
MOTHER-OF-PEARL
F. L. JENKINS

can hardly be criticised as restricted because the works produced by its assistance need some small amount of care to keep them from deterioration.

### Carved Brick.

There is one other sort of mural decoration which comes properly under the head of sculpture, because it has to be executed with the carver's tools. Carvings in brick have the sanction of long usage. They are to be found in buildings of various periods, and they have been adopted as a form of ornamentation in many countries. Generally they are treated rather broadly and simply, without much minuteness, and with robustness rather than delicacy; but occasionally very carefully finished work of beautiful execution is met with. The most ordinary use of the material is for conventional enrichments, for swags of leaves and formal patterns in relief; it hardly lends itself to the expression of fanciful designs, and is certainly ill-adapted for figure subjects. It is too soft and friable for deep undercutting, or for any great sharpness of projection; and, therefore, it is best when restricted to decorations which do not depend for their effect upon much play of light and shade. Weathering soon destroys the smaller details of the work, so the larger its masses and the simpler its forms the better is it likely to last.

It is necessary, of course, that bricks which are to be carved should be finer in texture and more even in grain than the commoner kinds ordinarily used in building. Excess of brittleness would make them difficult to cut, and any tendency in them to crumble would lead to uncertainty of touch. Properly prepared, however, they provide a substance which is sufficiently responsive to the tools employed, and capable within its limits of being handled with considerable variety of manner. Modern architects have utilised brick carvings in a number of ways. The domestic style which has been in fashion during recent years is one which calls for a certain freedom of ornamentation; and, though

this demand has been met to a large extent by the free use of terra-cotta, the necessity for diversifying the brickwork surfaces has often been apparent. Hence, there have been many opportunities for the display of the carver's skill; and in availing themselves of these opportunities the present-day workers have quite equalled the most praiseworthy efforts of their forefathers.

CEILING AND FRIEZE IN PLASTER

LORD BRAYBROOKE'S ROOM, AUDLEY END

# SECTION IV.

## PLASTER WORK.

It is impossible to draw a hard and fast line dividing true sculpture from relief work in plaster. Both require the same type of capacity in the executant, and the difference between them is one of material rather than method. The initial procedure in sculpture is the same, whether the design is to be ultimately carved in marble or cast in bronze. There are several preparatory stages to be gone through by which the work is developed from the first sketch and advanced towards its final realisation. First of all it has to be built up to full scale in clay or wax and carried in this form to absolute completeness. Then from the clay a mould is taken, and with the assistance of this mould the thing modelled is reproduced in plaster. This plaster cast serves as a guide in all the subsequent processes of carving or metal casting. In terra-cotta only is it unnecessary, because the clay itself, whether modelled by the artist or shaped in a mould, is sent to the kiln to be baked.

But in making plaster reliefs the whole process ends when the cast is taken. This undergoes no further preparation for its purpose, but is used as it comes from the mould. When fixed in the place it is to occupy in the building it is often gilded or painted with more or less elaboration, and its effect of light and shade is enhanced by freely added colour. As often, however, it is left white; and it is quite acceptable in this condition as a delicate and pleasant kind of ornament which is

rich without being obtrusive, and full of varied form without any departure from that reticence which is one of the chief essentials of sound surface decoration.

The art of modelling in plaster has been practised for many centuries. The Greeks and the Romans had an intimate acquaintance with its mechanism, and handled it with the most accomplished craftsmanship. The plaster they used was a sort of stucco, or cement, which became almost as hard as stone, and was as fitted for external as for internal work. They had, too, a method of carrying out designs in it by actual modelling which was admirable in its directness and in its convenience as a means of arriving at results full of spontaneity. This method was to draw upon a coat of wet plaster, spread on the wall, the outlines of the ornament which was to be executed, and then, by adding more of the plaster, and by working it into the required forms while it remained wet, to obtain the necessary amount of relief without the use of a mould. In such a way it was possible for the artist to exercise his ingenuity to the utmost, and to vary his motives and manner of handling as his fancy dictated. He could work in high or low relief with decision and vigorous effectiveness, or with the daintiest subtlety; his own taste and feeling settled the character and value of the results at which he arrived.

Among the Mahommedans stucco ornament was very generally employed during the Middle Ages. The Eastern and Moorish designers decorated their buildings inside and out with a wealth of geometrical patterns in relief, extraordinarily intricate arrangements of interlacing lines which produced an effect of astonishing richness and yet were quite simple in construction. Sometimes inscriptions in the flowing Arabic character were introduced as well, contrasting admirably with the more definite formality of the geometrical designs. As a rule the reliefs were accentuated with gold and bright colours which increased the beauty of the ornament and gave a sumptuous aspect to the architectural details.

ADAM CEILING

THE DINING ROOM, SALTRAM

Some of the best examples of this work are to be found in Egypt, and in Spain, notably in the Alhambra at Granada, and in the Alcazar at Seville. It has been well imitated in the Moorish Court at the Crystal Palace; and some modern architects have made not unsuccessful experiments with the style. As a way of breaking the monotony of flat surfaces, and of obtaining a delicate modulation of light and shade without contradicting the structural suggestion made by the building as a whole, it is particularly effective.

In England plaster reliefs first came into vogue about the beginning of the sixteenth century. They were not treated as delicately as the Italian work of the same period, but they were not wanting in vigour and freshness. The Eastern Counties especially provide many good illustrations of the manner in which stucco can be applied as an enrichment to an architectural design. In this part of the country a number of old houses exist which have as features of their external decoration graceful figure compositions in high relief and modelled with much skill. There and elsewhere may be found other houses ornamented within with friezes and ceilings fancifully imagined and marked by wonderful qualities of craftsmanship. The artists who busied themselves two or three centuries ago with such undertakings were men with the soundest knowledge of the resources of the craft they followed, and with a taste which had been educated by study of good authorities.

More recently the art underwent another development. For the sturdy effectiveness of the older ornament was substituted a more delicate and more artificial style. The Adam Brothers and their contemporaries pressed it into service as one well suited for the adornment of the houses which they designed. With its assistance they were able to complete that classic atmosphere which they desired to create. They devised an excellent system of decoration, a little conventional in manner, perhaps a little formal, but delightfully elegant and full of distinction. Some of the

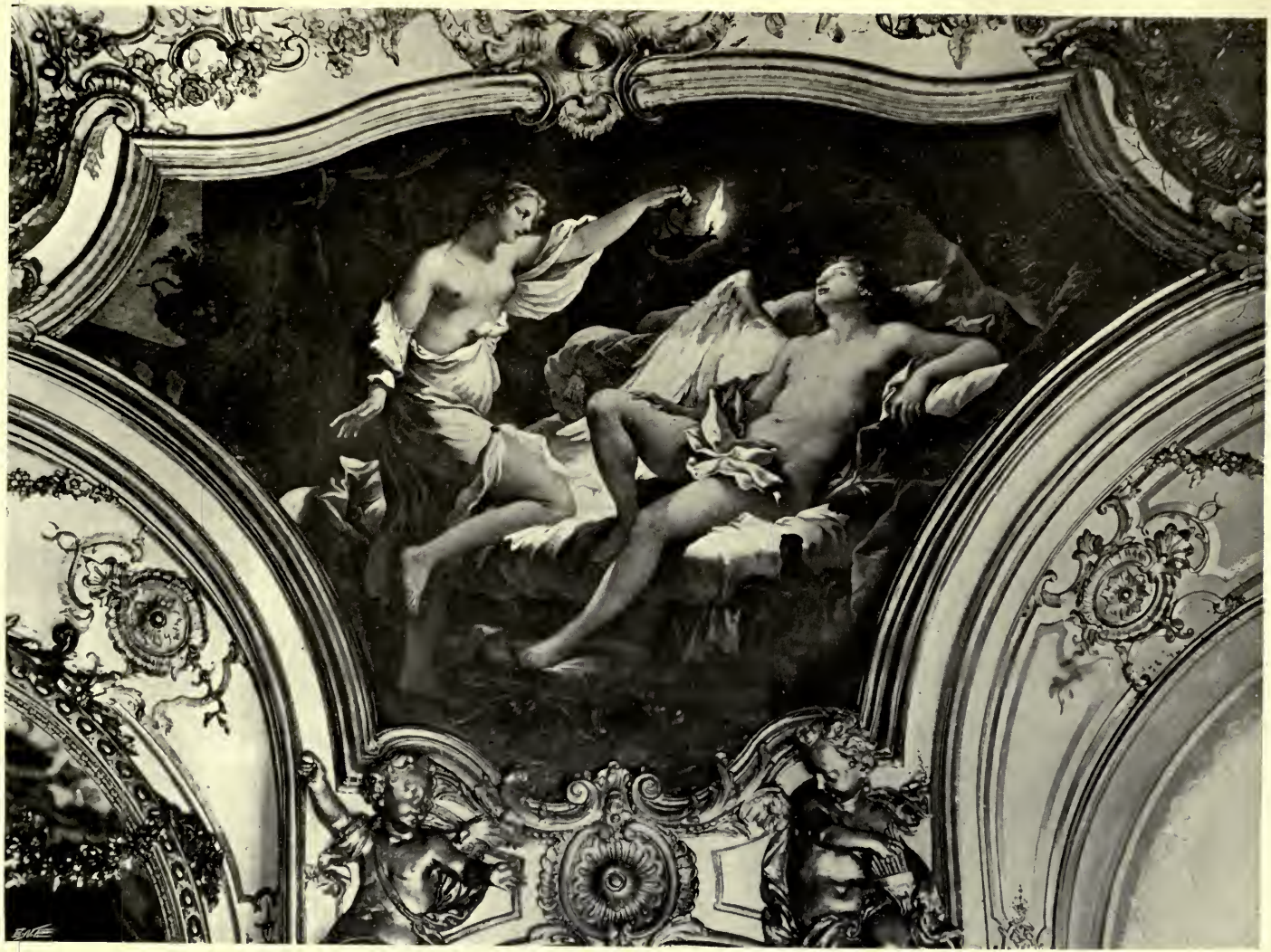
CEILING OF THE OPERA, PARIS — P. BAUDRY

happiest results were gained by the use of very low relief, and by adding colour in flat tints, so as to make the raised patterns contrast with the ground upon which they were laid. This was the method followed in many of the best ceilings which belonged to that period, and it has certainly given us much that ranks as highly important in the history of decorative art.

By no means all the plaster work of a century or so ago was, however, of this delicate and quiet type. There are instances enough of more aggressive modelling, of elaborate compositions full of florid detail and redundant in manner. Life-size figures in very high relief, and ornament on a large scale are far from uncommon; but artistically it is much less deserving of attention. It may be mentioned as exemplifying a misuse of the material rather than as a model for imitation. The more realistic

PLASTER CEILING

THE GREAT HALL
RAGLEY HALL



CEILING IN MODELLED PLASTER

HOTEL DES ARCHIVES, PARIS

and actual the treatment of modelled plaster the less its charm. It is far more acceptable when restricted within definite limitations than when it is allowed to compete at large with the recognised forms of sculpture.

A great deal of the French decoration in plaster is open to criticism because it is of this florid character. It often seems out of sympathy with its surroundings and over-insistent; and it becomes oppressive by its excess of display. Even the quieter examples are apt to be restless in line arrangement, and to lack the repose which is the pleasantest quality of good design. But in matters of execution the French work of the best periods is difficult to surpass. It has real beauty of finish, it keeps consistently to the style chosen, and it shows earnest striving after the finest qualities of workmanship. What is really at fault in it is the taste responsible for the style chosen. A kind of theatrical craving for surprising artistic situations, a love of luxury, and a desire to be demonstrative, reflecting the temperament of the people themselves, are the dominant notes in most of these decorations, and govern, as well, the direction of much of the modern effort.

It is certain we owe to the French influence certain of the merits and the defects of the more elaborate reliefs which exist in this country. We have borrowed from time to time characteristics which, however appropriate in France, are hardly in keeping with our manner of life; but we have also learned some invaluable lessons in craftsmanship by watching the methods of our neighbours. Still it can be fairly said that we are now more inclined to revert to the quieter style of our ancestors than to run after more demonstrative fashions. The plaster modelling which is most in request to-day is not deficient in freedom, but it keeps aloof from all temptations to become redundant, and errs, if anything, on the side of severity rather than excess. We are, thanks to the efforts of some of the cleverest of our younger sculptors, developing a manner of dealing with such works which is marked by admirable taste and

considerable beauty of accomplishment. It is original, too, in an agreeable way, and, therefore, promises well as a basis for future progress.

### Plaster Modelled and Painted.

One of the most acceptable additions to the available forms of mural decoration is an outcome of this modern desire to make the most of the old art of working in plaster. Several artists, prominent by reason of their capacity as designers, have hit upon a way of using reliefs executed in this material, as substitutes for wall paintings. They have found it practicable to adapt them sufficiently to pictorial purposes without departing unduly from the conventions of sculpture, and without being obliged to attempt a dangerous compromise between two more or less opposite types of expression. What they have really done is to combine in equal proportions the characteristics of sculpture and painting, and to ally both arts in a joint decorative mission. The results of this combination have been already of much moment. Some important undertakings have been carried through to conspicuous success by men who have studied the possibilities of painting on plaster, and the public response to the efforts of these pioneers has been definite enough to justify considerable expectations of a wide and lasting demand.

The idea which underlies this method of working is to make the design permanent by modelling it in low relief, and then to give to it a full pictorial character by applying colour to the modelled surface. In this way the danger that changes in the pigments may destroy the whole of the picture painted on the wall is avoided. If for any reason the colours faded the form would still remain, and there would be no great difficulty in restoring the original character of the design. That absolute effacement, with no possibility of repair, which is so often the fate of fresco and other kinds of wall painting need not be feared. All the important facts of the composition will last while the plaster holds together ; and as

MODELLED AND PAINTED
CEILING

SALLE DES FETES
HOTEL DE VILLE, PARIS

DESIGN FOR PANEL GERALD MOIRA

the material is a reasonably trustworthy one and capable of resisting many of the bad influences which threaten the life of the generality of decorations, there is for the works executed in it a very fair chance of longevity.

Not the least of the merits of the process is that from beginning to end it is without any executive difficulties which cannot be overcome with moderate ingenuity. The haste and hurry of fresco painting, the minute precautions necessary in handling waterglass, the careful preparations needed in spirit fresco, can all be avoided, and in their place there is a perfectly simple procedure which leads surely step by step to the final accomplishment. First of all the relief is modelled in clay in exactly the same manner as it would be for reproduction in marble or bronze. From the clay the usual mould is taken, and from this mould a cast in a specially compounded fibrous plaster. This compound is firmer and more coherent than the ordinary plaster of Paris, less likely to crack or to soften

with age, and it gives a very agreeable surface with just the right texture to receive the pigments laid upon it.

Before it is painted the plaster is prepared so as to prevent its absorbing too much of the binding medium in the colours, which are painted on solidly enough to produce a rich and telling effect and yet not so heavily that the advantage of the white ground beneath is lost. The ground, indeed, serves as a priming, and shining through the colours gives them luminosity and enhances their brilliancy. The fullest range of tints is possible, and gold or other metals can be added to increase the gorgeousness of the arrangement. There is nothing to hamper the artist in the expression of his ideas. He can be fantastic in his freedom, or quiet and reserved, playing as he pleases over the whole chromatic scale and using as he feels inclined the suggestions made to him by his subject and materials.

It is to this absence of restrictions that is due in great measure the success of much of the work which has been done in painted plaster during the last few years. The men who believe in its capabilities have tested it in all sorts of ways and have found it adapted for a surprising variety of artistic purposes. They have experimented with it over a wide field of decorative art, and it cannot be said to have failed them even when they have wandered into unfamiliar paths. Indeed, some of the best results have been obtained by departures from strict custom, and by the readiness of the designers to recognise that they have at their disposal an art which does not tie them down absolutely to follow in the wake of their predecessors.

The most interesting examples of the modern application of the art are those provided by Mr. Gerald Moira and Mr. F. Lynn Jenkins, working in collaboration, and by Mr. H. C. Fehr, Mr. Pomeroy, Mr. W. R. Colton, and Mr. R. Anning Bell. Messrs. Moira and Jenkins have been responsible for a number of striking productions which are

MODELLED & COLOURED
PLASTER

W. R. COLTON

distinguished by much fertility of imagination and by strong individuality of method and treatment. The partnership of these two artists happens to be peculiarly well balanced. Mr. Jenkins is a sculptor with a graceful sense of line arrangement and a certain robustness of manner which enables him to deal with large compositions broadly and confidently. His modelling is never trivial, and it is free from that insistence upon small details which is one of the worst vices of the decorator who has not learned the greater truths by which his craft is directed. Mr. Moira is a painter who combines a just feeling for harmonies of colour with much quaintness of sentiment. He thinks out his subjects judiciously, and avoids in his manner of handling them any tendency towards commonplace methods. His taste inclines him to aim at a sort of romantic quality in his designs, a quality which is attractive because it is unforced and spontaneous, a logical result of his way of looking at Nature and not an artificial acquirement assumed merely for the sake of effect.

MODELLED AND COLOURED PLASTER — W. R. COLTON

Although Mr. Moira and Mr. Jenkins have been working together for some five or six years only, they have already made for themselves a

prominent place among the younger decorators. The best known of the works for which they have been responsible are the panels and friezes in the Trocadero Restaurant, and in another restaurant which the proprietors of the Trocadero have opened in the City. Scarcely less notable are a series of panels which they executed for the library of a house in Yorkshire, the inside and outside ornamentation of the Peninsular and Oriental Pavilion at the Paris Exhibition, and the interior decoration of the new Bechstein Hall. In each of these instances they have kept consistently to their own idea of what is appropriate, and have made no concessions to the hard and fast believers in one or other of the accepted styles. They have had the courage to strike out a way for themselves, and to follow it without any hesitation about its fitness to lead them in the right direction. That they have chosen wisely is beyond dispute, for they have succeeded in establishing a standard against which the efforts of other men must be measured.

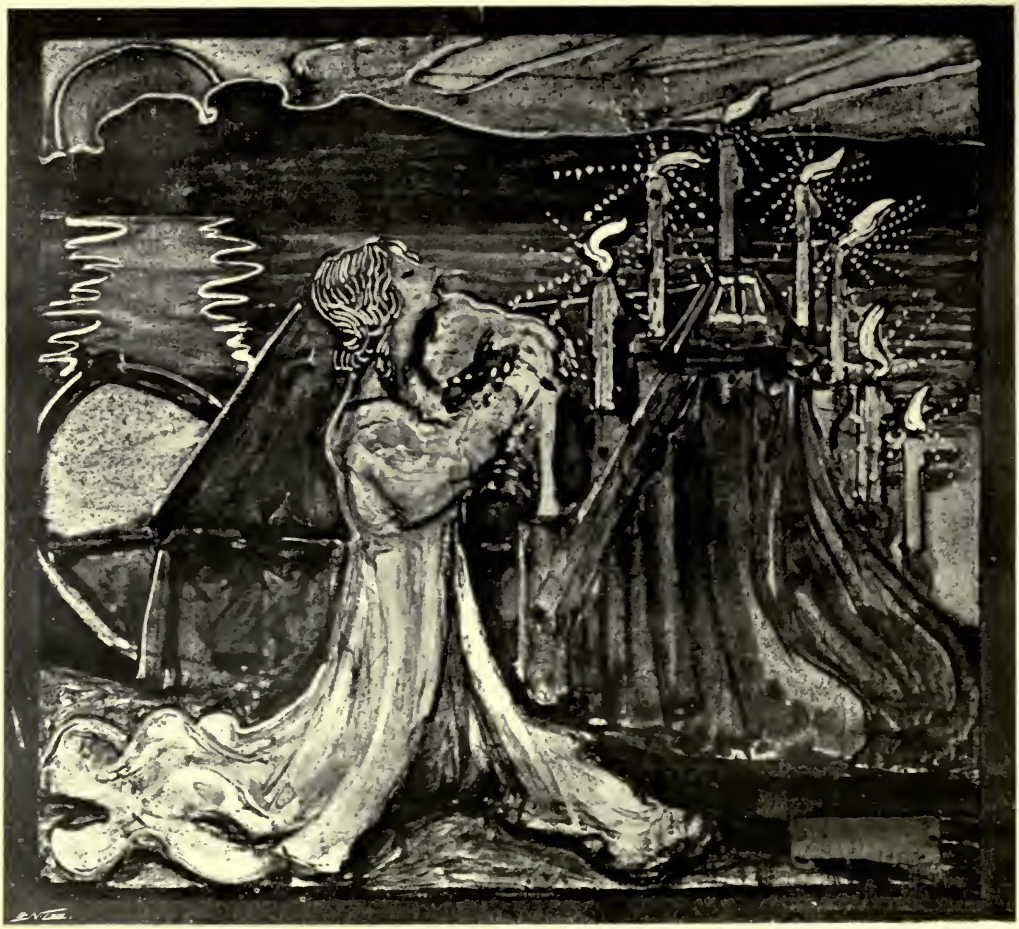
The principal characteristics of the works which they have so far produced are the quietness and reserve of the modelling and the soundness of the colour treatment. As a rule they prefer to keep the projection of the reliefs comparatively slight, and to trust to the colour to accentuate the light and shade effect by its thinness on the raised surfaces and its greater body in the depressions. As the pigments are wiped rather than painted on to the plaster, they lie on it more or less unevenly, and have a sort of accidental quality that is distinctly pleasant when controlled by an artist who knows how to turn the tricks of his medium to good account. This accidental quality, indeed, must be reckoned among the advantages of the process. It needs to be studied, and, in a measure, prepared for; but, if its vagaries are once mastered, it will prove of great assistance in bringing about that suggestion of spontaneity which is especially worth striving after.

DESIGN FOR FRIEZE
IN COLOURED PLASTER
BY GERALD MOIRA

There is a similar cleverness of technical contrivance in the painted reliefs which Mr. Anning Bell has executed. His taste inclines him to a simpler and less fantastic style than that which Messrs. Moira and Jenkins have chosen. He delights in delicate idealism, expressed not only in selection of subject, but also in the tenderness of his colour and the subtlety of his modelling. The pictorial character is almost entirely absent in his productions; they are, up to a certain point, strictly conventionalised, but the convention is intelligent, and is determined rather by a particular view about the proper use of the materials than by any desire to limit the range of the art itself. He has adopted a mode of treatment which reflects his instinctive preferences in design, and he has given these preferences ample scope. Hence, his work, delicate though it is, is strongly personal and full of meaning.

A not less personal, but yet very different, class of practice is that followed by Mr. Pomeroy. His management of modelled plaster—well illustrated in some internal decorations for a house recently erected in London from the designs of Mr. C. J. H. Cooper—has some affinity with that of the Adam brothers and the men of their period. It is marked by very scholarly feeling for refinement of line and for the gentle gradations of light and shade which are only attainable by an artist who understands perfectly how to deal with the most delicate kinds of low relief. It is finished without being laborious, and is perfectly accomplished without a touch of pedantry. Above all, it has no trace of affectation, and is neither matter-of-fact nor eccentric.

Mr. H. C. Fehr has, perhaps, more inclination to make the most of the possibilities of gorgeous display which are provided by this form of mural decoration. On several of the reliefs which he has modelled, and notably in his series of panels, illustrating scenes from the Wars of the Roses, in the County Hall at Wakefield, he has revelled in elaboration of detail and sumptuousness of colour. His treatment is based upon that affected by



DESIGN FOR PANEL G. MOIRA AND F. L. JENKINS

the mediæval workers in plaster, and is strongly suggestive of study of those examples which are still extant in some foreign cathedrals. It is quite in accordance with tradition, and revives legitimately the methods of other times.

Obviously, an art which will satisfy such varied demands and lend itself satisfactorily to so many purposes is almost unlimited in its possible applications. That it is best suited for internal decorations need hardly be said, but if the plaster is good in quality and properly fixed to the wall

DESIGN FOR PANEL G. MOIRA AND F. I., JENKINS

it will stand exposure to the weather for a comparatively long time without perceptible deterioration. Indoors, however, in a situation where it cannot be damaged accidentally, it is, in its modern form, hardly less reliable than it was in Roman times. With the right degree of skill and the necessary endowment of artistic inspiration the men who undertake work in modelled plaster can hope for really memorable results, and they need never fear that they will be prevented by mechanical disabilities from expressing their best convictions.

## Gesso Work.

There is a good deal of similarity between the effects obtainable in plaster and those which result from work in gesso. Indeed, these two crafts are closely allied. They have existed side by side for many centuries and can scarcely be said to occupy different spheres. They can almost be regarded as alternatives, and if it is necessary to draw a distinction between them it must be defined simply as one of procedure. Modelled plaster is primarily a sculptor's art, in which the painter intervenes to give the finishing touches; gesso is primarily a craft for the painter, but it demands of him, if he hopes to be successful, some considerable knowledge of modelling, and, at all events, a reasonable appreciation of the way in which forms should be realised in the round. Mr. Walter Crane, who has treated it successfully, says that it stands midway between painting and sculpture, and partakes in its variations of the characters of each in turn. He regards it as a kind of link which binds together the two great forms of Art and draws its vitality from both of them.

Like so many of the other decorative processes, it was practised by the Romans, and afterwards carried to a high pitch of perfection by the artists of the Italian Renaissance. There are examples of its use as an adjunct to fresco in the wall paintings by Pinturicchio in the Vatican, and as an independent method of ornamentation in the Doria Palace at Genoa, and in many ecclesiastical buildings in various parts of Italy. In paintings it was chiefly limited to those details of a design which were required to be in relief, to patterned backgrounds and raised ornaments in the costumes and architectural accessories, and when applied in this way it was generally gilded. In other cases it was cleverly utilised for relieving plain surfaces in walls and ceilings with intricate ornaments in gold and colours, and for the decoration of pictures and mirror frames

MODELLED & PAINTED
CEILING

DORIA PALACE
GENOA

FRIEZE PANEL IN COLOURED GESSO, BACKGROUND STAINED WOOD — G. W. ELLWOOD

and articles of furniture. Modern workers have found it admirably suited for raised patterns and small pictorial panels in house decoration, and have also continued the mediæval practice of embellishing with it cabinets and frames and other objects which lend themselves to fanciful treatment.

The composition of gesso varies according to the character of the work which is to be executed. For decorations on a large scale a mixture of fine mortar, plaster of Paris, and size or glue, answers excellently; and for finer designs it is compounded of whitening, glue, and gelatine, with some boiled linseed oil and resin, which are mixed together warm until they form a creamy paste. Occasionally sugar, or wheat flour, is added. The whitening mixture makes what is called gesso duro, which sets comparatively slowly, but becomes when dry

extremely hard. It is best adapted for highly-finished works which have to be given a very smooth surface, and its slow drying makes possible a more deliberate mode of handling than could be attempted with mediums which set quickly and have to be treated with particular readiness.

In working it is necessary first of all to prepare the plaster or wood to receive the gesso and to make it non-absorbent. If this precaution were neglected there would be a great danger of damage to the gesso work, because the suction of the ground would destroy the adhesiveness of the paste and allow it to peel off as it dried. A coat of shellac or varnish is generally laid as a basis; it makes the ground impervious, and is pleasant to paint upon. When the design has been drawn on this the paste is applied with a long-haired brush, which is held as nearly as possible upright so as to drop the gesso accurately within the outlines. Several coats are given if much relief is desired; and as soon as the work is dry it can be scraped and polished, or if necessary retouched.

For large decorations in which there is much projection it is more convenient to use other tools beside the brush. The paste can be laid on with a spoon, or it can, by mixing it with tow or cotton wool, be built up with the hand or modelling tools, and can then be finished with brushwork. This addition of tow or wool makes the gesso more solid and toughens it sufficiently to prevent any separation of large masses from the ground. It allows also more freedom of treatment, as the qualities both of modelling and painting can be obtained, and many varieties of contrivance can be turned to good account.

There is throughout the whole process ample scope for the exercise of individual taste and personal feeling about devices of execution. At the same time there is in the inherent characteristics of the art much that is suggestive to an artist who studies the tendencies of his material and seeks to work under those conditions which seem to promise the most effective

COLOURED GESSO
*Copyright, W. Reynolds-Stephens*

W. REYNOLDS-STEPHENS
*Photo, W. E. Gray, Queen's Road, Bayswater*

results. The peculiar texture of the gesso paste and the way in which it falls into certain forms as it flows from the brush control very perceptibly the nature of the designs which should be attempted. Fluent, easy lines, with graceful curves and free definition, are the most satisfactory, because they come naturally from the right use of the medium and from the proper management of the necessary tools. The best kind of craftsmanship is that which is based upon these peculiarities and shows intelligence in adapting them to the preferences of the worker. No man can hope to be really successful in his dealings with the art if he wilfully disregards its mechanism and aims at effects which it will not legitimately give.

Above all, it is necessary that there should be no fumbling or uncertainty in execution. Careful preparation of the materials is essential, and a knowledge of their behaviour under all sorts of conditions is requisite if unaccountable accidents, which might thwart the best intentions, are to be avoided. Of equal importance is a delicate nicety of touch, by which alone the most perfect expression can be secured. Every stage from the first treatment of the ground to the last details of the surface finish must be duly considered, and its relation to the rest of the work must be fully appreciated. It would be easy, with a very small amount of carelessness or mismanagement, to fall into slovenly ways and to spoil a good design by inefficiency of workmanship. But the conscientious craftsman, who thinks seriously about what he is doing, is never liable to fail for want of care. Experience would soon teach him what to guard against; and with comparatively little practical investigation he would quickly discover the directions in which he could do the fullest justice to his powers.

What should be the treatment of gesso after the modelling of the forms and patterns is completed is a matter which must be decided by the preferences of the artist and the particular destination of each piece of work. There are many famous examples which have been left plain and are notable simply for their beauties of design and handling. But there are many others which have been carried further by the addition of gilding and colour, and even by enrichment with glass or precious stones set in the paste. The modes of applying the colour vary considerably. It is possible to use water colours which are afterwards varnished; or, if a coat of varnish is laid first on the plaster to make it non-absorbent, oil pigments will give an excellent effect, especially if they are thinned sufficiently to become semi-transparent. Another kind of colour treatment is to gild or silver the gesso and then to tint it with lacquers, which do not obscure the brilliancy of the metal surface;

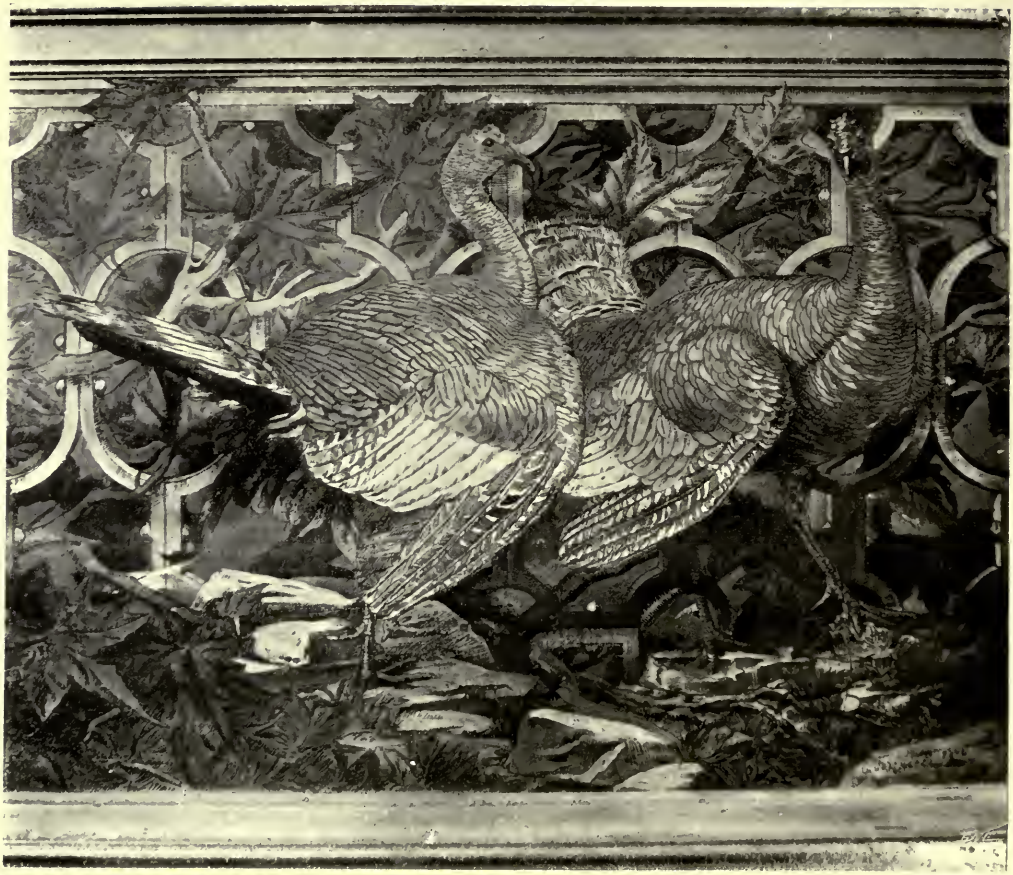
PANELS RAISED IN GESSO
COLOURED AND METAL LACQUERED
H. C. BREWER

and yet another way is to paint it with egg tempera. In the choice of the most suitable method the artist has ample latitude, the extent of his ingenuity will be the measure of his success.

### Sgraffito.

The fundamental difference between sgraffito and the other forms of plaster work is that it makes its chief demand upon the skill of the draughtsman rather than the modeller or painter. It is an art in which the management of lines and the ordering of them into suitable patterns are matters of supreme importance. Colour plays a subsidiary part in this type of decoration; it can be introduced with good effect, but it is not essential as in fresco or mosaic. Admirable results, indeed, can be arrived at in sgraffito by the use of black and white only and by keeping strictly to the simplest juxtaposition of light with dark. It is most convincing when it is most straightforward and direct in statement, and when its naturally formal character is carefully respected.

The art is, as its name signifies, one in which a process of scratching or incising is employed to express the meaning of the worker. In its rudimentary form it is, perhaps, the oldest known, for by its aid primitive man made those sketches, upon bones or slabs of stone, which show the first glimmerings of the artistic sense. But the term sgraffito is now limited to a particular method of scratching lines upon a plaster surface which has been prepared beforehand to give certain results. The plaster is so laid that the incisions in an upper coat reveal a lower stratum of a contrasting colour, and these incisions, when arranged according to a preconceived design, form patterns which are susceptible of very varied and pleasant treatment. In the hands of a man who comprehends the possibilities of pure line, complicated and elaborate ornamentation can be obtained by this simple device; and to expand it into a pictorial process without losing its best qualities is by no means difficult.



PORTION OF A FRIEZE IN SGRAFFITO C. FORMILLI

So far as its mechanism goes there is nothing which need trouble much a craftsman of average skill; the preparations which have to be made for the work are easy to understand. First of all the wall must be cleared of any old plaster there may be upon it, and the brickwork roughened, if necessary, so that it may hold the new plaster securely. Then after the wall has been well soaked with as much water as it will absorb it receives the first, or coarse, coat—of sand and Portland cement, in the proportion of three to one— which should be about three-quarters of

SGRAFFITO DECORATION

C. FORMILLI

SGRAFFITO C. FORMILLI

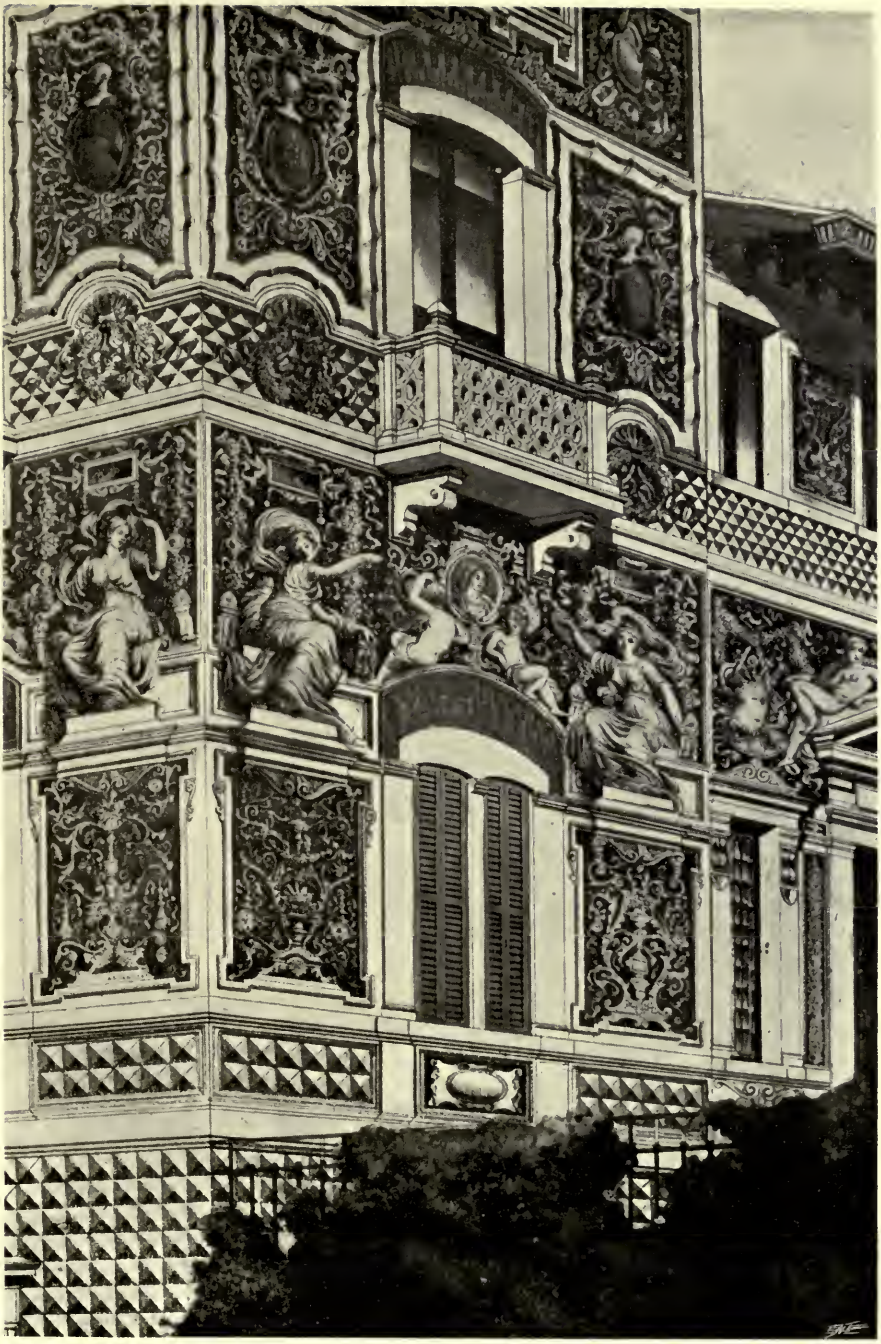
an inch in thickness. When this has set it is covered with about an eighth of an inch of cement with which a colouring material has been mixed; and over this is finally laid a surface coat of carefully sifted lime and selenitic cement, or lime and Parian cement, which should also be an eighth of an inch in thickness.

Meanwhile, cartoons have been drawn to the full size of the intended decoration, and have been pricked ready for pouncing upon the wall.

As soon as the final coat of plaster has hardened sufficiently to bear handling, but before it has actually set, the outlines are pounced on it, and the artist with a small stylus or other convenient tool cuts the plaster so as to show the coloured ground beneath. As the surface coat is white, or nearly so, the design appears in dark lines and spaces which have at a little distance the effect of being drawn upon the light plaster. It must be noted that, as this incising must be done while the material is soft, only so much of the wall as the artist can deal with in each day's working must be covered with the white coat; it would be fatal to leave the plaster to set, as then it would resist the action of the tool and hamper hopelessly the efforts of the executant. But when the whole design is completed, and the plaster has set firmly, the decoration becomes an actual part of the wall. Only an accident serious enough to separate the plastering from the brickwork could destroy it. There is little chance of its changing in colour, and damp is, in the ordinary course of things, unlikely to affect it to any great extent.

In the simplest kind of sgraffito the colour of the ground is the same throughout; as a rule it is black or dark red. But when more complicated effects are desired patches of plaster in various tints can be laid where they are required to show in the finished work. They need, of course, to be placed with great accuracy, for any carelessness in the planning of these colour areas would lead to confusion in the cutting away of the white coat, and would spoil the certainty of the incising. But when proper precautions are taken against mistakes, surprisingly ambitious designs, approaching fresco paintings in their character, can be carried out with little risk of failure; and the addition of reasonably vivid and varied colour does not cause any departure from the purity and dignity of manner by which the art at its best is distinguished.

The sequence of processes is the same in coloured sgraffito as it is in the ordinary form which deals only with dark lines incised in the light



EXTERNAL DECORATION IN SGRAFFITO C. FORMILLI

plaster. But to secure the right distribution of the patches of colour the drawing must be transferred to the coarse coat before the second, or colour, coat is applied. The best way to do this is to pin the cartoon to the wall with long nails which make perceptible holes in the plaster, and to pounce through the pricked outlines; and then, after the cartoon has been taken away, to draw on the wall the exact shape of the space that each colour has to occupy. The nails are then put back in the holes and the colour coat in all its variety is laid on without displacing them. By this practical device the holes are kept open to serve as guides for the second pouncing on the white coat; they ensure absolute certainty in the placing of the cartoon and prevent any hesitation on the artist's part as to the effect which will be produced when he cuts away the surface plaster. It is easy to see that without some such reliable guide the positions of the colour patches would be difficult to fix accurately when the white coat had been laid over them; and as any deviation would cause serious defects in the design there is an obvious necessity for these precautionary measures.

This is the method followed by Mr. Heywood Sumner, who is one of the best living authorities on the technicalities of sgraffito work. He has applied it with remarkable power in many important undertakings, and by his ingenious use of all the resources of the art he has done much to reinstate it among the recognised methods of mural decoration. In his coloured designs especially, he shows admirable versatility and the soundest judgment; he is never extravagant, and never forgets what are the limitations beyond which it would not be legitimate for him to stray; but he has a happy quality of audacity which has helped him to memorable successes. Another artist who also has used discreetly what is really a combination of fresco painting and incised line drawing is Signor Formilli. He affects subjects of a much more pictorial type than those preferred by Mr. Heywood Sumner, and

SGRAFFITO HEYWOOD SUMNER

handles them with conspicuous skill. In his hands sgraffito becomes extremely flexible, and seems easily adaptable to almost any kind of ornamentation, external or internal.

The history of the craft covers many centuries. There are Roman remains which show that its capabilities were well appreciated early in the Christian era, if not before; and there are many examples of its use in mediæval Italy. It is supposed to owe its revival there to an artist called Morto da Feltri, and to have been popularised by his efforts. At all events it came into fashion not only in Italy but in other countries as well, and it was not uncommon in England in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. After that, however, it remained amongst us in a condition of suspended animation, and only in recent years have any serious efforts been made to study its possibilities. Credit must be given to the late F. W. Moody, who held for some time the post of Museum Decorator in the South Kensington Museum, for perceiving that the Art was one

which claimed serious consideration; he studied it with much care, and under his direction it was employed for the ornamentation of several of the South Kensington buildings. The exterior of the old home of the Royal College of Music, beside the Albert Hall, is elaborately decorated with his sgraffito designs, and there are others on the back wall of the Science School, in Exhibition Road, which abuts on one side of the South Kensington Museum.

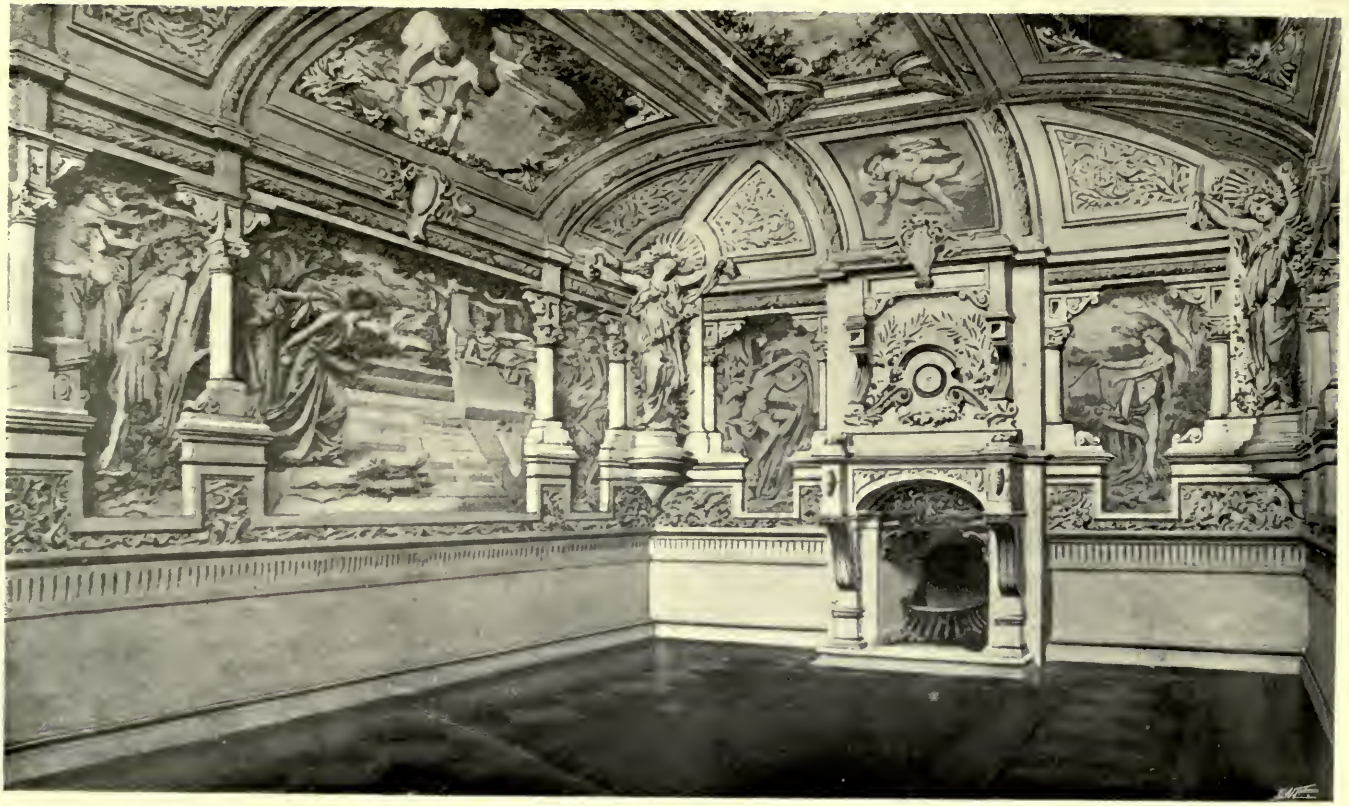
These examples are interesting because they may be taken as tests of the suitability of the art for external use in London. They are, it is true, of the simplest type and do not present any complications of colour treatment, or any qualities which might have resulted from exhaustive experiments. But they have a quiet and unobtrusive attractiveness as pleasant departures from the ordinary run of outside decorations such as the average builder delights in; and though they have been in existence for more than a quarter of a century they do not seem to have suffered any perceptible deterioration. Their permanence is instructive; it shows that there is in plaster work of this kind a degree of trustworthiness which claims the attention of all artists who are in search of technical processes which will not fail when tested with some severity, and it suggests that there are in the art virtues which can be developed.

Not the least of these virtues is the facility which it affords for producing harmonious and lasting colour effects. The way which is now being pointed by resourceful craftsmen like Mr. Heywood Sumner and Signor Formilli leads to results of greater importance than any which have been so far reached, and to refinements of practice which will become more and more subtle as the number of skilled executants increases. But there is one reservation which must be observed by everyone who strives for the perfecting of the art—there must be no abandonment of its permanent qualities for the sake of temporary effectiveness. Only such colours may be employed as will retain their

strength and brilliancy under the conditions to which they must necessarily be exposed. Like those which form the palette of the fresco painter they must resist the action of lime and they must not be liable to fade when exposed to strong light or to darken from the effect of impure air. An untrustworthy pigment would upset the calculations of the artist, and by the uncertainty of its behaviour would cause him endless worries.

Fortunately the number of reliable colours is large enough to give the painter fairly ample opportunities, and he need not fear that mechanical conventions from which he cannot escape will force him into a narrow groove where his originality will have no chance. Mr. Heywood Sumner finds specially prepared tempera colours, which do not suffer from contact with lime, perfectly suitable for his purposes; and with such pigments as manganese black, Turkey red, Indian red, lime blue, and golden ochre, he can make combinations which are sufficiently vivid to tell strongly when used in the subdued light of an interior, and at a considerable distance from the eye. The range of tints which these pigments, singly or mixed in the right proportions, will produce is a wide one, and is wanting in little that the decorator can reasonable require.

It would be, perhaps, incautious to attempt any exact definition of the artistic functions of sgraffito. There is always a touch of pedantry in those arguments which are so often advanced against the expansion of an art beyond the limits reached by ancient workers and prescribed by the customs of the past. The wail of the archæologist, who views modern effort as an irreverent denial of a creed laid down long ago by masters endowed with authority for ever, is a pitiable expression of an imperfect understanding, and if it were seriously listened to it would stifle effectually every demand for progress. But happily there are always some men who do not shrink from the effort to carry the arts in which they are interested further than their predecessors have done, and who do not mind being told that their work is not legitimate because it is not strictly in accordance



ROOM IN SGRAFFITO
C. FORMILLI

with precedent. At any moment such a one may be able to add new facts to the available store of knowledge about this particular craft and to prove that it has capacities hitherto unsuspected.

As far as can be judged at present, it is chiefly adapted for designs in which there is no suggestion of aerial perspective and no minute variation in light and shade relations is aimed at. The best effects are obtained by the juxtaposition of flat tints and by the use of well-defined and firmly-drawn lines. Much can be done with flowing scroll patterns and arabesques which are not too small in detail; and a strong blocking out of well marked forms is always agreeable if it is managed with intelligence and a proper sense of proportion. When figure subjects are selected they must be handled with a sense of style which hits the right mean between bareness and elaboration of details. Largeness and simplicity are the qualities fittest to seek for, because they come naturally from the most direct use of the medium. The whole treatment is an affair of definite planes, and the more sincerely this fact is recognised the truer will be the relation between the matter and the manner of the art.

It must not be forgotten that sgraffito is essentially a decoration for flat surfaces, for those parts of a building, indeed, which are structurally significant, and that it can be used to ornament large spaces in which unconventionalised paintings would be wrongly placed. It is an architectural device which cannot be separated from its surroundings without loss of meaning. By the character of its technique it becomes actually and optically a part of the wall to which it is applied, and to ignore this, its dominant feature, would be to rob it of one of its main reasons for existence. Whether or not less restricted ways of dealing with it can be devised remains for future experimentalists to discover; so far, the possibility of a development so opposed to all its well-established traditions seems hardly ripe for discussion.

# SECTION V.

## CERAMIC DECORATION.

The efforts of many generations of decorators to discover an absolutely imperishable medium which they could use in their work have probably produced nothing which fulfils this essential condition better than glazed earthenware. This manufactured material by its hardness of surface, its capacity for receiving almost any kind of colour from the most delicate tints to the deepest and richest hues, and by the ease with which it can be adapted to very diverse purposes, is peculiarly fitted for architectural ornament. It will serve for flat surface decorations, or for modelled work in high or low relief; it can be added to an existing structure, or used in the construction of the building. Properly fixed, and in situations where it is not exposed to blows or violent handling, it will last without change practically for all time, and will certainly survive long after marble has crumbled into shapelessness, and metal has corroded beyond all hope of repair. Its only weakness arises from the fact that as it is made by baking clay it is brittle and easy to break or chip; but in this respect it is not more unreliable than plaster or terra-cotta, and it is only a degree more fragile than marble.

On the other hand, as a medium for the expression of colour it is surpassed by no other. It rivals, indeed, mosaics at their best and

strongest by its brilliant variety; and its glazed surface makes it richer and more lustrous than any painted work. By the process of firing the colours are fixed to the clay, and the glaze protects them from all chance of fading or becoming altered by the action of the atmosphere. They are not affected by heat or cold, or by damp, and are proof even against direct sunlight. They can be produced, too, in numberless shades, and can be enhanced by metallic lustres of infinite beauty. The range of opportunities which they give to the designer is almost without limit; he need never fear that he will be checked in ambitious schemes by the discovery that he has to contend against difficulties caused by the inadequacy of the means at his disposal.

Indeed, when a worker has once made himself acquainted with the chemistry of ceramic manufacture, and knows how the pigments which he has to use will behave when fired, and how the protective glazes must be compounded to give the right degree of transparency or opacity, he will find ample scope for the display of his decorative ingenuity. He may keep, if he pleases, to pattern designing, and to the arrangement of conventional forms, or he can launch out into pictorial compositions of a complicated kind, and deal freely with realistic detail. The controlling influence will be his own taste and his interpretation of the canons of art; there is in the mechanism of ceramic decoration no impassable barrier which shuts him off from the free exercise of his capacities.

The technicalities that he needs especially to study are those which have to do with the preparation of the clay, and with the application of different kinds of glazes. The preparation of the clay is a matter of importance, because upon it depends the fate of the work when exposed to the great heat of the kiln. If the material is lacking in silica it shrinks excessively in baking, and often twists out of shape or cracks, while clays which contain a large proportion of silica shrink hardly at all, and are not liable to warp. So to ensure a reasonable freedom from accidents,

manufacturers combine with the clay whatever may be necessary in the way of silica, lime, or other substances, and by careful mixing make the whole mass uniform in composition. The artist who does not understand this process of combination runs the risk of seeing his productions spoiled and his intentions made unavailing, because he cannot tell exactly how his material will serve him.

Moreover, upon the character of the clay depends to a great extent the nature of the glaze which can be applied. A fine glaze full of silica can be safely laid only upon a clay which is itself, naturally or by mixing, well provided with the same mineral; if there is any failure to observe this necessary condition the glaze is apt to lie unevenly, or even to crack off in firing. A hard coating, again, which requires to be fused at a high temperature, cannot be used with a soft clay which might itself be fused in the kiln. There must always be the right adjustment between the substance selected for the work and the superficial additions by which its decorative character is determined.

The glazes which are commonly employed in decorative ceramics vary considerably in their nature. In them all the chief material is glass, but to this different substances are added, according to the effect which the artist desires to produce. Stoneware, a hard form of ceramics which plays a part of some importance in modern architecture, is often covered with a transparent salt glaze, through which the natural colour of the clay shows plainly; but it is not infrequently treated with coloured glazes, or even with opaque enamels. The colouring is produced by mixing metallic oxides with the fusible glass; when exposed to the heat of the kiln they become so intimately a part of the vitreous coating that it takes a uniform tint throughout. They are ground with the glass into a very fine powder, which is made into a creamy paste by adding water, and laid upon the clay with a brush, and the firing converts this paste into a perfectly even and homogeneous film, covering completely the whole surface.

THE REFRESHMENT ROOM
SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM

Opaque enamels are made by the addition of certain metallic substances which, when fused, destroy the transparency of the glass without affecting its vitreous qualities. Binoxide of tin, for instance, changes it into a white glazed material which obliterates the colour of the ground. On this white coating other colours can be painted in any desired designs, and fixed by a second firing. Experience alone will teach the artist what he can do; but when once he has mastered the rules of the art, and can foresee what is going to happen when he commits his work to the kiln, he need not fear failure. He does not depend for his results upon lucky accidents, but upon a scientific system which has been built up through many centuries, and by a long succession of careful investigators.

## Glazed Bricks and Tiles.

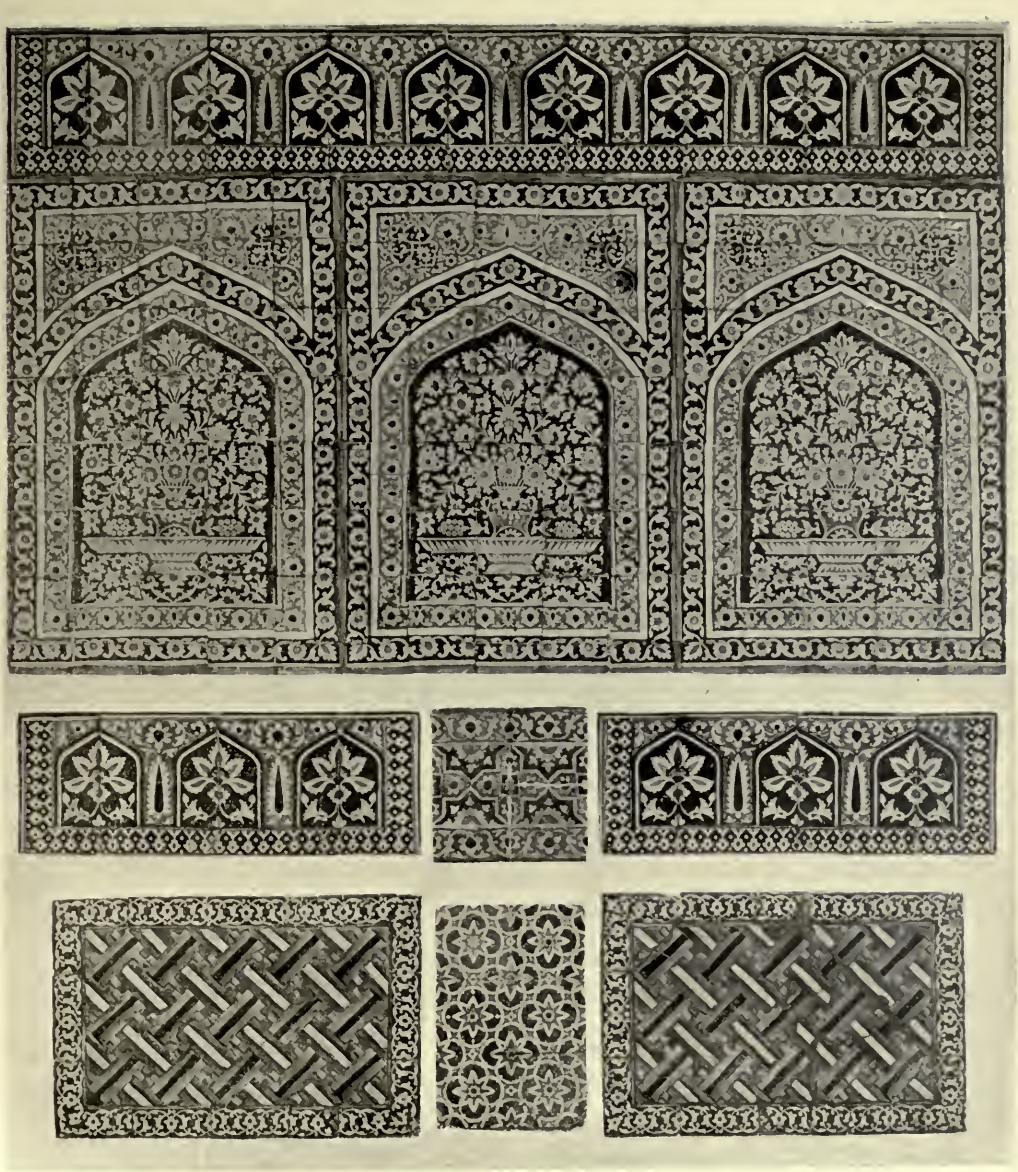
Some early instances of ceramic decoration are to be found in Assyria. As long ago as the twelfth century B.C. glazed bricks were commonly employed in the palaces of Babylon and Nineveh, where they served not only for cornices and mouldings, but as well for friezes and panels in which figure compositions were represented. These bricks were mostly of a rather coarse texture, and were covered sometimes with hard vitreous enamels in brilliant colours, and sometimes with unglazed paintings in subdued earth colours. Frequently they were modelled with patterns in low relief and decorated with enamel to emphasise the design; in this form they were chiefly used to surround the painted panels into which the wall spaces were divided.

These panels and friezes were treated with notable freedom, and with much freshness of manner. The subjects chosen for them were mostly historical incidents, the achievements of Assyrian warriors, and scenes from the life of the period. They were admirably designed and full of spirit, and the harmonising of the colours was managed with a correct

appreciation of artistic requirements. Sometimes these figure compositions were moulded in low relief and covered with enamel colouring laid in a semi-fluid paste upon the surface of the work; and occasionally pastes of different colours were used to pick out various parts of the reliefs so as to obtain brilliant contrasts and extremely gay effects. In all the Assyrian ceramics which are now available for examination there is evident a thorough knowledge of elaborate processes of manufacture; and there are ample proofs that the ancient artists were well practised in subtleties of chemical combination. Their work shows perfect certainty of method, and is extremely intelligent in its adaptation of devices of handling.

The Egyptians, too, were skilful potters and understood how to gain the greatest possible vivacity of colour by adding metal oxides to the silicates which they used for glazes and enamels. There are now in the British Museum specimens of Egyptian wall tiles which antedate, by some two hundred years, even the earliest of the Assyrian examples. They are reliefs of groups of men and animals very daintily modelled and enhanced by a kind of inlay of enamel pastes which have been applied where required by the character of the design and then fixed by firing. The treatment of these tiles is delicate and minutely detailed, but at the same time rich and effective. The colouring is realistic, but its management is marked by a strong sense of decorative obligations and by sensitiveness to beauties of arrangement. Indeed, in the productions of these remote periods the union of technical accomplishment and artistic taste usually seems to have been thoroughly well balanced, and to have been distinguished by a completeness of practice which has not been surpassed in later centuries.

There has never been any break in the history of ceramic decoration. Almost every nation has added something to it, and has developed some of its characteristics. Among the Orientals especially, in Persia, Damascus, and in the countries occupied by the Moors, the art flourished exceedingly. It was not disregarded by the Greeks and Romans; and by the Italians of



TILE WALL PANELLING
FROM HALLA, SIND.
INDIA MUSEUM

the Renaissance it was adapted to important purposes. In more modern times it has provided many types of designers with endless opportunities, which they have not been slow to recognise and to profit by to the utmost. At the present day the greatness of its vocation is fully appreciated. Applications of it in the most diverse ways are to be noted in all directions, and it fulfils adequately a surprising variety of missions in connection with architecture.

Perhaps the most familiar adaptation of the material is that by which painted tiles are made to serve in the place of fresco or mosaic for the ornamenting of buildings. For a very long time this class of work was carried out with enamelled slabs or plaques akin to those for which the Egyptians and Assyrians were responsible. The famous Persian tiles, and those which were used in Moorish buildings in Spain and other countries, as well as the many memorable examples of ceramic work which exist in India, were treated in somewhat the same fashion as the pre-Christian examples. They were frequently enriched with modelled details and were painted with bold and effective patterns in brilliant colours. But, unlike the old glazed bricks which were seemingly subjected to only a single firing, these tiles went through several stages of production. Over the modelling was laid a thick white enamel, on which the pattern was painted, and, finally, smaller details were added in iridescent lustre obtained by the use of certain metallic oxides. Between each stage heat was applied to fix the painting and to incorporate it thoroughly with the ground. Things executed in this way have a more delicate quality than the robust and direct efforts of the old potters, and are susceptible of more minute finish. In the hands of the Moslem craftsmen of the twelfth to the sixteenth century they became delightful illustrations of an attractive development of a particular form of ornament, and they take a prominent place among the greater achievements which mark the progress of Art through successive generations.

The tendency now is in the direction of a more pictorial manner of dealing with wall-tiling. There is a fashion for pictures on ceramic surfaces, and lately the response to this fashion has been very general. Panels and friezes, which are in their strength of colour and their range of tones carried quite as far as paintings on canvas, have become common decorative devices. They are constantly to be met with in buildings where adornments of a permanent kind are desired, and up to a certain point they may be said to justify themselves. Their chief fault is a thinness of colour quality which makes them look mechanical, and, at times, commonplace ; it is most evident when very ambitious compositions requiring sensitive handling have been attempted, because the process of firing destroys some of the charm of the artist's touch.

In designs which have been judiciously conventionalised this loss of individuality in the handling is, however, not so perceptible. It matters less, too, because the chief concern of the worker under these circumstances is with matters of draughtsmanship and placing of colour masses rather than with refinements of touch. If he draws capably and distributes forms and colours with a right sense of relation, he will fulfil sufficiently well his duty to the craft, and he will arrive at more pleasing results than he can reach by any effort to imitate the methods of oil or water colour painting. This limitation does not mean that he will have only a little scope for the assertion of his personal conviction ; it rather defines for him the manner in which he can make successes which are almost unattainable in these other mediums.

Indeed, if a number of the best examples of modern tile work are examined, the impression that the art lends itself to a very wide variety of treatment is irresistible. There are plainly many ways in which it will serve as an adjunct to architecture without straining its capacities unreasonably and without disguising its technical characteristics. One kind of application is illustrated in the frieze which surrounds the

CERAMIC PANELS
GRILL ROOM, SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM

exterior of the Albert Hall. In this the range of colour is limited, and the mode of treatment is allied to mosaic on a large scale. The style of the work is like that followed by the Greeks in their vase paintings; the effect is produced by relieving figure designs in a uniform flat tint against a ground of a different colour, and by keeping to a studiously simple distribution of large masses. As the groups are of colossal size and set at a great height above the ground level, no painting on the tiles themselves has been necessary; it has been sufficient to use them in their natural colouring and to arrange them so as to reproduce the lines and spaces marked in the cartoons. This frieze was executed by six artists, Messrs. Armitage, Pickersgill, Marks, Yeames, Horsley, and Sir E. J. Poynter, each of whom undertook to design the filling of one of the sections into which it was divided. It is interesting both as a piece of unusual accomplishment in decorative art, and because the men whose services were requisitioned can be ranked among the more prominent members of the modern British school.

CERAMIC PANEL, GRILL ROOM, SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM — SIR E. J. POYNTER P.R.A.

Another form of ceramic decoration may be studied in one of the refreshment rooms at the South Kensington Museum. In this instance tiles and plaques, painted with figure subjects and floral patterns, have been set in wood panelling so as to make a high dado round the room. They are drawn with some vigour and without much conventionalising of details, but they are kept

almost exclusively in shades of blue and white. Their chief merit is their unpretentiousness. They do not profess to be elaborate pictorial efforts, and they deal with none of the problems which have engaged the attention of the learned potters in all periods; but they may be noted as marking what was, when they were executed, more than a quarter of a century ago, quite a bold departure in mural ornamentation. Since then such decorations have come into common use. In restaurants, shops, public halls, and in numbers of private houses, they are the most familiar expedients by which pleasant touches of colour can be introduced into interiors which would otherwise be dull and lifeless; and by the ingenuity of the designers ways of treating the ceramic material have been invented which make this South Kensington example seem comparatively primitive and out of date.

The Museum, however, provides yet another illustration of the possibilities of the alliance between the arts of the potter and the architect. In the chief refreshment room, in the ceramic gallery, and on the staircase which leads to this gallery from the ground floor of the building, glazed earthenware has been employed not merely as an incidental means of adorning the walls, but as an actual part of the structure. The refreshment room professes to be entirely a piece of ceramic construction. The lining of the walls, the pillars, and the mouldings and soffits of the arches are made of this material throughout, and it serves even for the most elaborate details of the decoration. The tiles with which the pillars and parts of the walls are covered are modelled with patterns in low relief, and bands with compositions of figures and inscriptions are added with good effect. The colour is rich, but not garish, and it is lightened by the introduction of masses of pure white. Altogether the room is perfectly consistent in character, and is by no means lacking in dignity and artistic meaning.

A similar mode of treatment has been followed in the ceramic gallery,

FAIENCE CORRIDOR
*Photo G. W. Wilson, Aberdeen*

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS
GLASGOW

but it has not been carried quite so far. The staircase is more noteworthy, because it gives a good idea of the possibilities of modelled earthenware in the hands of a clever designer. It is a florid piece of work, with a great deal of ornament in high relief; and, though its style is, perhaps, unduly demonstrative, its very excess of effect is instructive. A medium which will do so much can certainly be trusted as a means of expression, and cannot be said to fail through lack of adaptability. Another building in which it is usefully applied is the National Liberal Club, but in this instance the ornament is neither gorgeous in colour nor complex in its forms; it is restricted chiefly to patterns in low relief and gentle tints, and is distinguished by a certain severity of manner. The Faience Corridor in the Glasgow Municipal Buildings is also important as a more recent example of the capabilities of glazed materials.

In external decoration the value of tiles as colour accents in an elevation has been proved often enough to put it beyond question, but hitherto they have been used by modern architects in rather a tentative fashion. In this country, at all events, there are but faint signs of any desire to rival the pleasant audacity of the Eastern workers in their management of this form of ornamentation. But instead there has been slowly growing up during recent years a taste for coloured earthenware as a building material. Glazed bricks and moulded architectural details enamelled in strong shades of colour have come to be regarded as quite legitimate aids to striking architectural effects, and several buildings now exist in which these adaptations of pottery have been substituted for the more familiar brick or stone. That they are not more numerous here in England may be ascribed to our constitutional timidity with regard to the handling of colour in architectural works, which has long hampered the efforts of the few men amongst us who resent the dull aspect of our streets. Still sufficient has been done to open the way to better things, and as time goes on we may hope to see a much more general use of a

material which is in many respects the best that could be devised to satisfy the needs of the modern builder.

At least it cannot be said that there is any inefficiency now in the manufacture of ceramics intended for decorative purposes. In this

TILE WORK W. DE MORGAN

country and abroad the processes by which every class of glazed earthenware is produced have been carried to a very high degree of certainty. Firms like the Doultons, intelligent experimentalists like Mr. W. de Morgan, and artists like Sir E. J. Poynter, Mr. C. F. A. Voysey, and Mr. Walter Crane have done their utmost to help on developments full of practical utility. Mr. de Morgan especially has, by his investigations into the devices of the ancient potters, added largely to the available resources of the craft. He has re-introduced the method of enhancing painted designs by adding lustre colours, which was practised so successfully by the Persians and other Eastern nations, and he has perfected by an exhaustive series of experiments the

intricacies of this important mode of decoration. He has worked with the self-sacrificing enthusiasm of a man with great ideals of craftsmanship, and has spared no pains to reach the highest possible level of accomplishment.

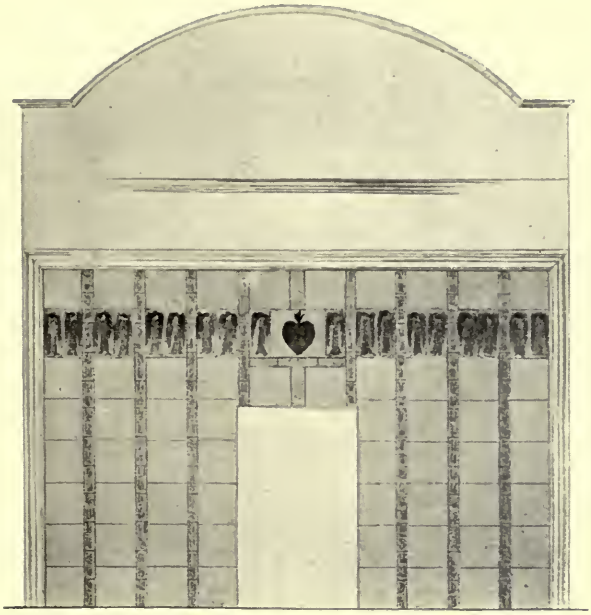
Excellent as the qualities of the material certainly are, it has in use some defects which call for amendment. While it satisfies all reasonable conditions by its permanence, its beauty of texture and colour, its suitability for all kinds of purposes, and by its freedom from any serious mechanical difficulties in preparation, it is apt to betray a little too plainly the nature of its origin. As it is scarcely practicable to bake big masses of clay without running the risk of their cracking or getting out of shape, ceramic work has to be built up with a comparatively large number of small pieces, and unless these pieces are fitted together with scrupulous exactness a scrappy effect cannot be avoided. For instance, in the pillars of the refreshment room and the ceramic gallery at the South Kensington Museum, the joinings of the small tiles with which they are faced are a little too much in evidence, and suggest a degree of structural weakness in what should be a strong and substantial part of the building. This defect is, it must be admitted, merely an optical one, as the tiles are nothing more than the casing of a core which actually supports the arches, but it tends to destroy that sentiment of solidity which is necessary in architecture.

Another point open to criticism is the liability of facing tiles to become detached from the wall either by the action of damp or by wear and tear. It does not seem easy to devise a perfectly sure way of fixing them so as to make them safe against accidents, and in this respect they are less trustworthy than mosaics and much less easy to repair. In the case of an ambitious decoration of a pictorial character, the displacement and destruction of even a single tile would leave an unsightly gap which would be difficult to fill satisfactorily. But to find a remedy for these

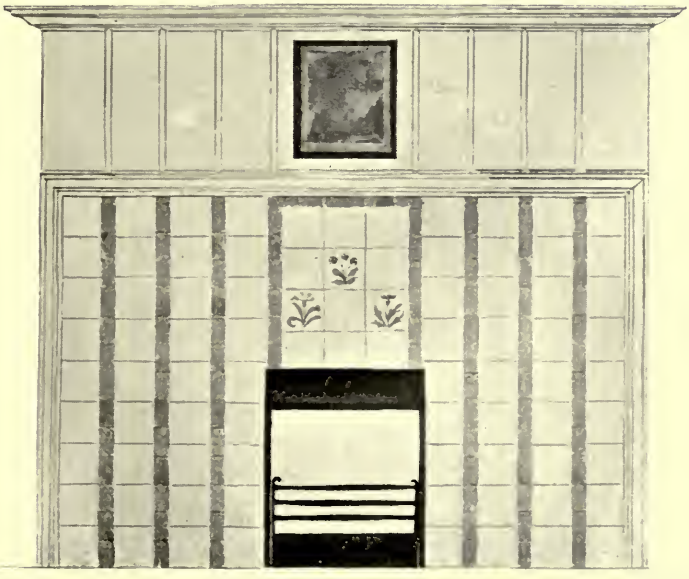
defects ought not to be impossible; and if they can be removed there seems no reason why the artistic treatment of ceramic work should not be enormously extended. As a material it is, at least, as useful as ordinary terra cotta, and to the designer who craves for colour it offers facilities which can scarcely be surpassed.

TILE FROM FIREPLACE OPPOSITE C. F. A. VOYSEY

There is, however, one thing which has in modern times delayed the complete recognition of the merits of the art. Although latterly artists of the highest standing have exerted themselves admirably in its behalf, they have to fight against an immense amount of popular misunderstanding caused by the lamentable want of taste shown by the lower class of manufacturers. A vast number of the designs which have been put on the market cannot be accepted as in any sense worthy of even momentary consideration, and will not bear comparison with the accomplished work of the designers previously referred to. They are feebly imagined, poorly executed, and wanting in most of the essential attributes of true decoration; they are, in fact, the productions of workers imperfectly equipped with artistic knowledge and inadequately trained in matters of craftsmanship. But such ceramics, especially in the form of tiles, are made in most unnecessary profusion and sold freely to a large class of customers. They are to be met with constantly in private houses where they are used to ornament fireplaces and mantelpieces, and to give a touch of spurious elegance to commonplace rooms; and for the most part they are



TILE FROM UPRIGHT BAND IN FIREPLACE AT SIDE



TILED FIREPLACES
*Manufactured by Pilkington's Tile & Pottery Co.*

C. F. A. VOYSEY

flagrantly unfitted by their crudity of colouring and weakness of design for any such application. These minor details of domestic decoration, when treated by a man of taste and not by the speculating builder, can, however, be made significant enough, and a perception of this fact is slowly spreading. As it grows it will diminish the careless demand for the bad work, and will allow the finer qualities of the art to gain the attention that is due to them.

### Glazed Earthenware Reliefs.

Although it is difficult to divide the different kinds of ceramic work into exact classes there is one type of decoration in relief which deserves separate notice. Modelled patterns are common enough in tiles, and have been in general use from the earlier ages to the present day. They have given designers many opportunities of adding varieties of surface texture to the effects produced by juxtapositions of colour, and they have opened the way to modes of treatment well outside the limits of surface painting. As a rule, however, they have been planned almost exclusively with reference to colour results, with an idea of gaining a certain diversity of shading by the way in which the glaze lies upon the projections and recessions of the modelled design ; they can scarcely be said to occupy a class by themselves.

But a special place must be assigned to those ceramics which claim kinship with sculpture. Primarily they are studies in form and have no concern with colour except as a means of enhancing their attractiveness by additions which are in a sense unnecessary. They require of the man who attempts to execute them a thorough control over the technicalities of modelling and a complete equipment of artistic experience. He must be, of course, a clever craftsman versed in the details of the potter's practice, but to this scientific knowledge he must add the intuitive feeling for the interpretation of Nature's facts which qualifies him to

take rank among great sculptors. No one whose accomplishment is indifferent, or whose training has been imperfect, can hope to excel in such a form of art, for it has all the difficulties of pure sculpture with the further intricacies inseparable from a craft which involves more than a superficial acquaintance with the properties of many chemical substances.

Moreover, there is already in existence a whole series of earthenware reliefs which, as the productions of a group of artists of exceptional ability, have established a standard that few modern men can hope to reach. The works of Luca Della Robbia, and his relations and followers, are admirable examples of the application of the ceramic material to the highest purposes of architectural decoration. They had the advantage of being designed and modelled by men who aimed sincerely at high ideals and had the courage to strike out for themselves an independent line of practice. The method employed was not an absolutely novel one, for it was in many respects the same as that followed by the Persian potters; but these fifteenth century Italians carried it further than any of their predecessors, and developed it in ways which the earlier craftsmen do not seem to have recognised as possible.

Luca Della Robbia was the ablest and the most ingenious of this group of artists. Before he made his first experiments in glazed earthenware—or perhaps more accurately, glazed terra-cotta—he had proved himself to be, as a sculptor, the equal of his master, Ghiberti, and his great contemporary Donatello; and as he was a man of middle age before he gave himself up almost exclusively to the work with which his name is so closely associated, he was able to bring to bear upon it well-matured intelligence and powers perfected by continued practice in his profession. He did not attempt to merely translate into earthenware the same type of subjects that he had previously treated in marble or bronze; instead, he adopted a fresh series of motives, which, by their particular character, lent themselves well to that combination of

fanciful invention and sturdy actuality which is obvious in his reliefs. He inclined especially towards very exact realism in all the details which he used, but he arranged them with a surprisingly true perception of decorative balance and of the relation which the various parts of a design should bear to one another. This perception is to be noted above all in his management of colour. His harmonies were never ill-adjusted, and, brilliant as they almost always were, rarely passed beyond the bounds of good taste into garishness or excess of display. He worked with a due appreciation of the conditions under which architectural ornaments must necessarily be seen, and aimed at largeness of style and masculine dignity of manner.

His process was simply to give to reliefs, modelled in clay and baked, a white enamel glaze produced by adding oxide of tin to the usual vitreous ingredients. Sometimes this covering of white enamel sufficed, but more often parts of the design were picked out with shades of yellow, green, purple, blue, and black, by the use of other metallic oxides. As both the white ground and the added colours were fused on to the surface of the clay in the kiln they became absolutely indestructible, and are to-day, after the lapse of more than five centuries, as pure and brilliant as they were when first applied. No weathering has been able to affect the sharpness of the modelling, and, save for accidental breakages, the examples of the art of Luca Della Robbia, which are now to be studied in the South Kensington Museum and other galleries, are as perfect as if they had just come from his hand. One of the most remarkable of the South Kensington specimens is the great medallion with the arms of King René of Anjou set in a framework of fruits and flowers in high relief and coloured with much realistic brilliancy. In some of the others a central figure composition, glazed with the white enamel only, is surrounded with a coloured border ; and in others again every detail of the work is effectively treated in the most varied tints.

After the death of Luca Della Robbia his work was successfully carried on by his nephew and chief pupil, Andrea, and he again trained five of his seven sons in the practice of the art. By these members of the family a few variations were introduced into the original method of working, but in all essentials Luca's admirable tradition was maintained nearly to the end of the sixteenth century. Outside the family a number of imitators sprang up who showed a good deal of activity in their adaptation of earthenware to mural decoration, and added considerably to the list of acceptable examples. But by the beginning of the seventeenth century the fashion had died out—possibly for want of able craftsmen to keep it alive—and the manufacture of these reliefs ceased. It had never spread to any perceptible extent outside Italy, and had never obtained a permanent footing in other countries.

During the last few years, however, some English workers have made an intelligent attempt to revive the best characteristics of the Della Robbia method, and have produced a fair number of things which justify the hope that ceramics in this manner may once more be reckoned among the recognised forms of architectural ornament. The bands of relief work which are to be seen in the refreshment room at the South Kensington Museum have an interest as suggestions for a more extended treatment. They are there little more than incidents in a larger scheme, but they point the way to more ambitious efforts, and hint at possibilities which men of capacity could easily develop. What is wanted is not a mere transplanting of the Italian art, with all its native peculiarities, to a soil where, bereft of its local and historical associations, it might seem incongruously placed, but an adaptation of it to modern wants, a combination, in fact, of the old-time sincerity and technical mastery with the present day inventiveness and love of varied expression.

There are, indeed, almost endless ways in which the example set by these artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries might be made to bear

ample fruit now. Even if the bright colouring in which the Della Robbias delighted were thought to assort badly with the stiffness and formality of our street architecture, it would not be difficult to find in the old work precedents for a quieter type of treatment. Friezes of white figures relieved upon a plain coloured ground are by no means uncommon, and their dignified simplicity would be thoroughly in keeping with the severest type of design. Moreover, subdued or delicate tints are as easily managed as the gayest arrangement of colour, and strict reserve is as permissible as the freest fancy. The only decorative disadvantage inherent to these reliefs is that they must have a somewhat highly-glazed surface, and so may seem at times a little unaccommodating in texture, especially when they are juxtaposed with duller materials. This, however, can hardly be called a serious defect. It may occasionally cause inconvenience, but it is a comparatively small matter to set off against the many other good points of ceramic art.

It must never be forgotten that to the glaze, and to the mechanical processes by which it is produced, is due the pre-eminent advantage which earthenware, as a building and decorating material, possesses over every other substance, natural or manufactured. Terra-cotta, of the ordinary sort, may be as lasting, but it is limited in its range of colours, and

ENAMELLED EARTHENWARE MEDALLION — LUCA DELLA ROBBIA

cannot, when unglazed, be used in any polychromatic scheme. Stone, marble, bronze, and plaster, undergo changes, both of colour and texture, which are sometimes extremely rapid, and always inevitable within a comparatively short time. Earthenware, however, when covered by a coating of glass fused on to it at a very high temperature, will remain, as history proves, without any perceptible change for some thousands of years. The most ambitious decorator may well be satisfied with a medium which will secure for him such a near approach to immortality.

## Enamel.

Whether decorative work in enamel can be rightly treated under the heading of ceramics may, perhaps, seem open to question. But there is some justification to be found for such a classification in the fact that the enamel surface is, like the transparent coating of earthenware, or the coloured glaze in Della Robbia work, simply glass attached to a metal base by being baked in a kiln. In its main principles the method by which delicate and detailed enamel paintings are produced differs little enough from that employed by potters for their broader and more forcible effects. Varieties of colour are produced by mixing powdered metallic oxides with finely ground glass, and by painting this mixture, when made into a paste by the addition of some volatile oil, upon sheets of metal, which are then exposed to heat sufficient to melt the paste into a perfectly homogeneous mass. In elaborate pieces which require high finish or much variety of effect, many paintings and firings are needed, and much of the ultimate result depends upon the judgment and technical skill of the artist engaged in the work. Comparatively slight miscalculations will often upset a well-intentioned scheme, and small errors in execution frequently spoil what promised at the outset to be a quite successful production.

Hitherto, there have been few attempts to apply enamels on metal to

the purposes of the architectural decorator. The art has been practised for centuries by craftsmen who have occupied themselves with making articles of personal adornment and other artistic objects, and quite recently Professor von Herkomer has used it for portraits of a comparatively large size. But there has always been a difficulty in dealing with the indispensable metal sheets on to which the enamel has to be fused, they have a tendency to warp and twist in the heat of the kiln, and the larger they are made the more pronounced this tendency becomes. Therefore, the generality of the examples of enamelled work are too small to be available for any form of mural decoration ; and as it is not easy to join many sheets together so as to produce a really satisfactory effect, enamellers have for the most part avoided forms of practice which seemed more likely to lead to disappointment than to any success proportioned to the trouble involved.

Mr. Henry Holiday has, however, just perfected a way of treating enamels which enables them to be conveniently used for large panels and friezes, and for filling wall spaces of considerable area. The details of his process have been settled by a long series of experiments, and he has given to it a good deal of attention during the last few years ; so that, though his application of the art is novel and contrary to accepted precedent, the results which he has achieved cannot be lightly dismissed as tentative or ill-considered. They represent the conclusions arrived at deliberately by a practised designer who has a very thorough knowledge of many branches of his profession, and is by inclination little disposed to be bound by traditions which tend to limit his freedom of action.

The points of difference between this new work of his and that which has been done by many generations of enamel painters are not so great as at first sight they might seem to be. He has retained all the ordinary technical methods of his predecessors, and has added to them some devices of his own which are suited to his special purposes. These

devices are intended chiefly to improve the effectiveness of the enamel surface, so that its brilliancy and purity of colour may be properly visible at a distance—to make it as rich and harmonious in large scale decorations as in little things which can be examined closely. That they are successful every one who has seen the panels which he has recently executed will readily admit; and that they open the way to many remarkable applications of the art must be generally evident.

One of the most notable features of Mr. Holiday's system is that he embosses the metal sheets, and so obtains an effect of relief which gives him a useful play of light and shade. He begins by modelling his subject in clay, and then casts it in plaster. On the plaster he lays the pieces of metal, which are much thinner than those which enamellers use as a rule, and with suitable tools he presses them into the depressions of the plaster surface. In this way he produces an exact repetition of the modelled work with all its variations of relief. As the sheets have been cut beforehand into sections small enough to admit of their being conveniently fired in the kiln, he has to face none of the difficulties which would arise if he tried to handle large masses.

There is, however, one danger which has to be specially guarded against. As the metal he uses is so thin, the projections and depressions which result from moulding the plates upon the plaster cast would be completely obliterated during the process of firing, if some unusual precautions were not taken. What Mr. Holiday does to preserve these forms is to give to each piece of metal, before it is put into the kiln, a thick backing of plaster, which not only diminishes considerably the risk of warping or distortion, but also saves the delicate modellings from being affected by the great heat necessary to fuse the enamel laid upon the face of the plate. When the firing is over this plaster can be easily removed without any injury either to the metal or to enamel adhering to it.

PANEL IN GLASS
ENAMEL BY
HENRY HOLIDAY

A particular technical character results from this avoidance of a smooth surface in the work. The enamel, while it is melted and in a fluid state, has a tendency to flow thickly into the depressions and to lie more thinly on the projections, and this unevenness helps to accentuate the light and shade effect. The metal shines through where the enamel is thinnest, and is obscured where the covering is thick and solid; consequently, there is more variation of colour and more vigorous contrast of tones than it is possible to obtain with a perfectly even glaze. All this enlivening of the surface has its decorative advantage; it gives a pleasant accidental quality to the handling, it prevents the mechanical appearance which is apt to come from smoothness, and it diffuses the glitter which may be in some cases a rather tiresome defect of such a light-reflecting substance as glass enamel. Indeed, in the whole of the preparatory processes by which he ensures the final success of his work, Mr. Holiday shows the completest understanding of the obligations that the designer must fulfil, and proves himself to be both resourceful and ingenious.

When all the pieces of metal required to make up the design are ready, and have received each one its coating of enamel, the last stage is to put them together, and to fix them securely so that none can become detached. In doing this Mr. Holiday takes a hint from the practice of mosaic workers, and beds the plates in hard cement which grips them firmly and binds them solidly together. The panels which he has so far executed happen to be things small enough to be treated in his own studio, and to be sent when completed to the places where they are to remain permanently, and, therefore, he has found it sufficient to put the cement bed upon a backing of frame work. But there seems no reason why in large decorations the cement should not be spread directly upon the wall, and the metal plates pressed into it like the mosaic tesseræ. It would be possible, too, to combine this enamel work with

ordinary mosaic, and to produce in this way contrasts of surface which would be not unpleasing.

Anyhow, whatever may be the applications of the process that designers may find practicable in the future, much credit must always be due to Mr. Holiday for having shown the way in which enamels can be adapted to the purposes of mural decoration. His invention adds one more to the permanent and trustworthy devices now available, and though he has carried it far, it seems to have capacities for still further development. Not the least of its advantages is that it requires to be handled by men of sound artistic knowledge, and makes particular demands upon their æsthetic taste and their executive skill; therefore, it is not likely to be cheapened, or to fall into the hands of mere journeymen workers.

THE HALL OF
NORTH MYMMS, HERTS.
FOR WALTER BURNS ESQ.
ERNEST GEORGE & PETO. ARCHTS.

# SECTION VI.

## WOOD-WORK.

If some examination is made of the artistic customs of many nations through a long period of the world's history, it is difficult to avoid the conviction that the architectural developments in different countries have been largely determined by the nature of the substances available for building. The general use of baked clay in Assyria, of stone in Egypt, or of marble in Greece, was the outcome not so much of an æsthetic preference as of the fact that these materials were in each case the easiest to obtain. In its earliest beginnings style in architecture was chiefly a matter of local conditions, and only in its later stages of evolution was it affected to any great extent by a deliberate effort on the part of the designers to secure particular aids to the expression of their ideas. But even where, in these later stages, the spirit of selection became active, the effect of the primitive conditions was not entirely lost; it was apt to make itself perceptible as a governing tradition, shaping and directing the intentions of the craftsmen, and guiding their production along definite lines.

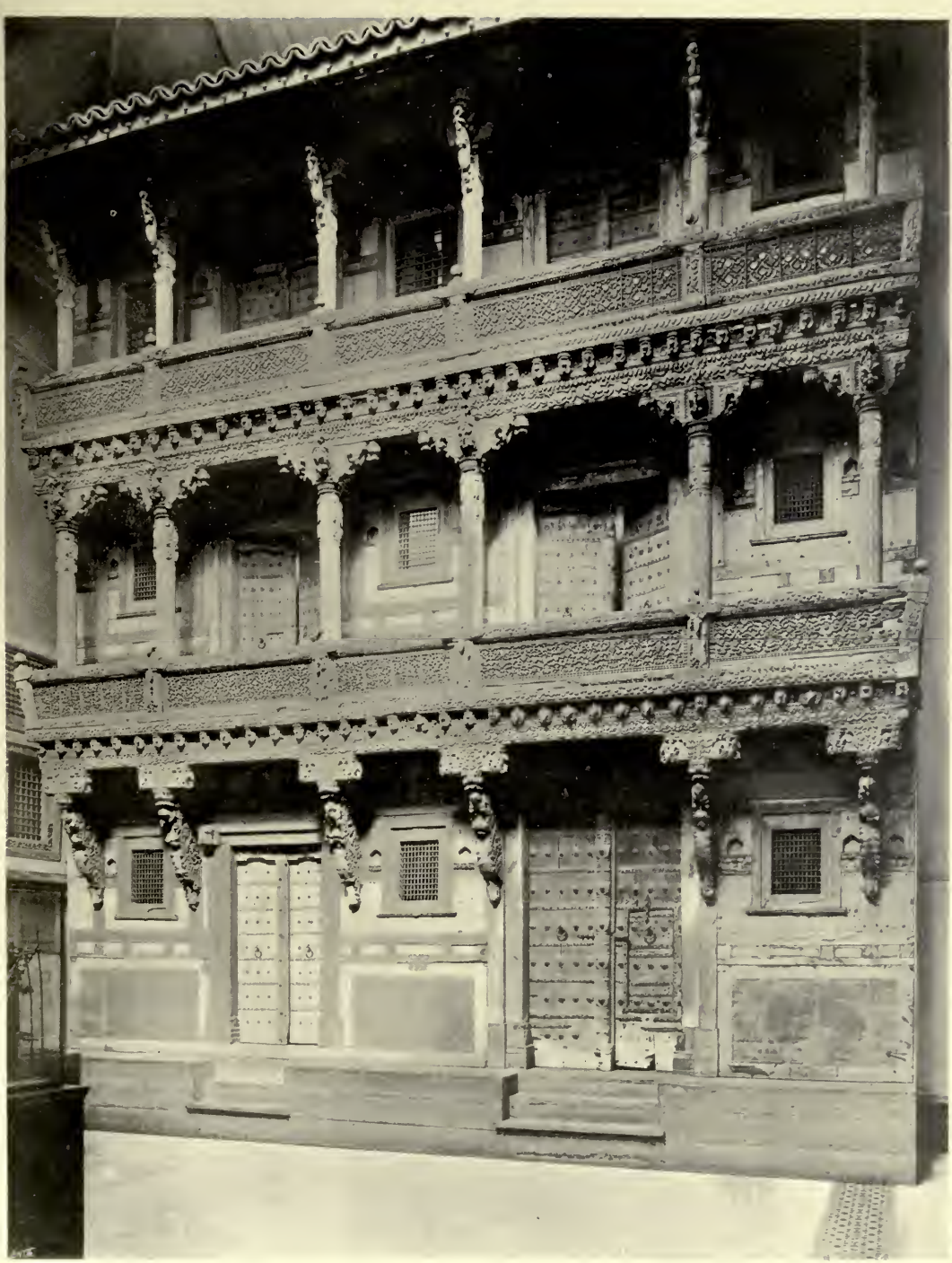
To the influence of such a tradition is due, unquestionably, the way in which timber construction has introduced some distinctive features into the architecture of almost every people in the world. Wood may be justly called the one universal material which has been always available.

No great exertion has been at any time necessary to procure it, and no serious amount of labour has been required to shape it into a workable form. The pre-historic savage, who could cut down a tree with his flint hatchet, depended upon it to provide him with a rough shelter from the sun and rain; the modern mechanic, with machinery at his disposal and armed with a whole battery of tools, still finds it indispensable in his work. In the course of ages many of its duties have, it is true, been taken over by brick, stone, or metal, and it has come to be allied with other things; but it still plays a prominent part in building operations, and is as necessary as ever to the comfort of the human race.

Japan, perhaps, affords the best example of the manner in which a complex national style can be developed out of a local preference for timber construction and of the way in which such a style will persist through a long succession of centuries. In Greece, the earlier influence can be recognised as fixing the character of the first stone buildings, and as laying the foundation upon which were based new devices in design that as time went on assumed shapes in which were lost all traces of their origin. But in Japan, a country liable to frequent earthquakes of a severe kind, wood, which could be bolted together into structures that were at the same time rigid and yet elastic enough to resist shocks, was practically the only trustworthy material, and so the common inclination to replace it with things more substantial never became active there. Instead, the artistic capacities of the people have been occupied in finding out how its special adaptability could best be utilised, and in contriving for it many quaint and ingenious applications. Consequently there has been kept alive in Japanese architecture a series of technical characteristics which are peculiarly complete and interesting in their suggestions. Scarcely anywhere else in the world can an art be studied which maintains with such equality the balance between the material employed and the mode in which it is handled.

HALL SCREEN

AUDLEY END



FRONT OF DWELLING HOUSE
IN CARVED WOOD, FROM AHMEDABAD

INDIA MUSEUM

In other countries, however, where large forests formerly existed—for instance, in Northern Germany, Norway, and parts of England—wood was widely in request because it was one of the cheapest and most accessible of materials; and wherever these conditions prevailed, a well-marked style grew out of them and flourished vigorously. Even now there are in Europe several old towns which can show a large proportion of timber structures, and of these structures many can be said to be of considerable architectural importance. But in this part of the world, wooden buildings—banned by present-day municipal bye-laws and regarded with suspicion on account of their inflammability—have almost ceased to be erected. The tendency to limit the use of timber to internal fittings, and to reserve it for those parts of a house which are structural in only a minor degree, is becoming daily more pronounced.

It is not surprising that such a material should have a long and honourable history as a decorative medium. Even in the hands of savages it lent itself well to the illustration of primitive notions about ornament, and its use in decoration has grown in proportion to its disuse in building construction among Western nations. Very many ways have been found of treating it satisfactorily both for internal and external adornments. It can be framed and put together so that its structural lines become in themselves ornamental, it can be carved or incised with forms and patterns of the greatest beauty, it can be inlaid with a number of different substances, or it can be polished so as to make its natural charm of colour and its intricacy of grain appear as decorative details of exquisite value.

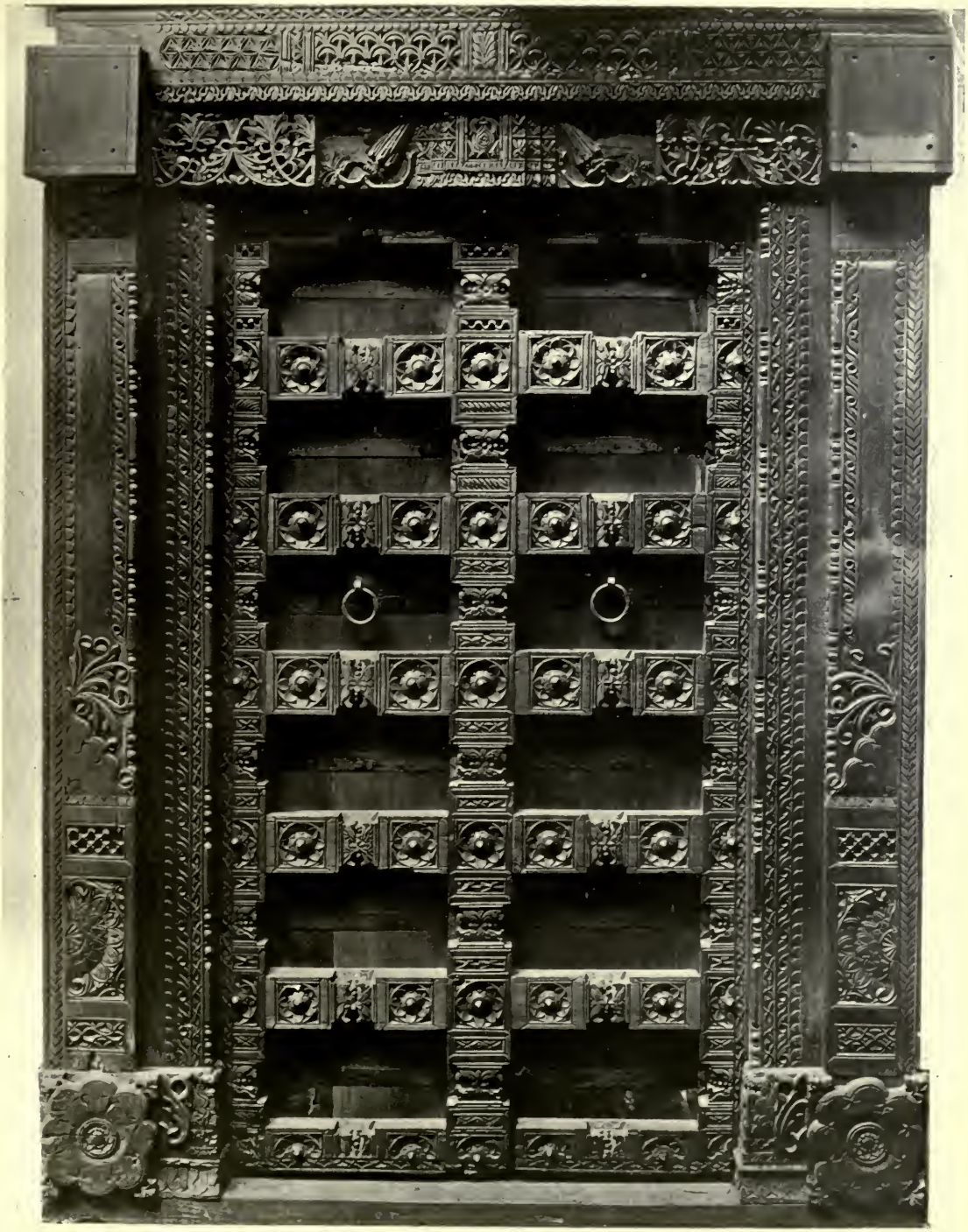
### Wood Carving.

The most familiar of all these methods of treatment is carving, by which the plain surface of the wood can be diversified with an infinite variety of fanciful ornamentation in all degrees of relief. Examples of

this branch of Art could be gathered from every quarter of the globe, for it is practised wherever the raw material is obtainable, and it has had a host of exponents in every age. In ancient times it served some of the purposes to which marble and bronze are now applied, and was recognised as a form of true sculpture. Wooden statues were common enough among the Egyptians and the Greeks; and in the Middle Ages they were very frequently included among ecclesiastical decorations. In Germany and Spain especially such works were treated by artists of much repute, who carved elaborate details with astonishing spirit and technical skill.

The carvings, however, with which buildings have been decorated have generally been marked by larger and bolder qualities. They have been mostly designed with a view to richness of effect and with a feeling for strength of character rather than delicacy of finish. Indeed, except where very hard woods, like box or ebony, are employed, the best results can be attained by decisiveness of touch and breadth of statement. A certain amount of relation between the texture of the material chosen and the manner of the handling is absolutely necessary, and any failure to adjust this relationship is always quite perceptible. Directness of execution, verging even on roughness, is always more acceptable than the mere surface smoothness which hides the individuality of the craftsman and gives to his work an air of mechanical contrivance.

It is this quality of directness which makes so pleasing the complex low relief patterns and the strange grotesques with which the Maoris and other peoples of the Southern Hemisphere have from time immemorial ornamented their dwelling places. It is not less attractive in the more studied and educated designs affected by the Japanese; and it is the source of much of the effectiveness of the architectural carvings of the German and English schools. In such work as this the honesty of the executant, his sense of proportion and of the relation which the projections



CARVED WOODEN DOOR
FROM SURAT

INDIA MUSEUM

HALL & STAIRWAY

BURTON AGNES

should bear to the flat surfaces, and his feeling for the right placing of dominant lines and important masses are the points most worthy of attention, and the sources from which come the soundest achievements. Technical trickery and the display of mere cleverness of hand are unacceptable, because they are apt to lead to the neglect of qualities of greater importance.

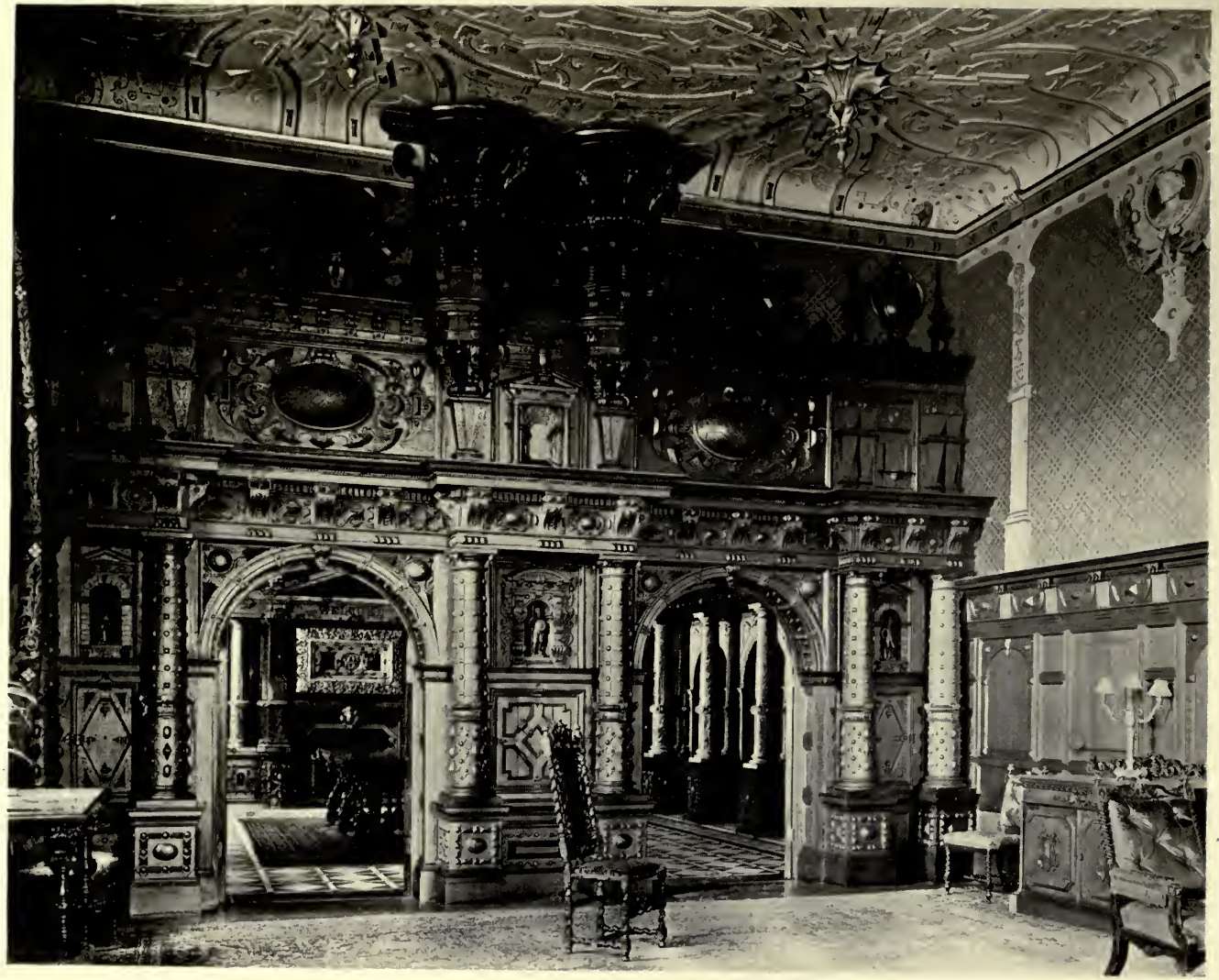
Of course, it must not be assumed that there is any pre-eminent merit in roughness of handling which is not justified by the circumstances under which the work has to be produced. But in wood carving, as in all other kinds of artistic effort, the method which takes the material properly into account, and respects its peculiarities, is certainly the one which has the most distinction. So long as these conditions are intelligently observed, any individuality of treatment is legitimate; and the widest range of execution, from large and simple blocking out to the minutest intricacies of modelling, is quite permissible. There is just as much real charm in the robustness of the carvings which decorate the ceilings and wall panellings of so many of the English country houses as there is in the subtle reliefs dear to the craftsmen of India. In both instances there is a delightful appreciation of the possibilities of characteristic expression which are inherent to a fibrous substance like wood. There is an entire absence of concealment about the technique adopted, and there is certainly no affected seeking after mannerisms which belong to other materials.

These points call for all the more emphasis, because there has sprung up with the last few years a style of wood carving which ignores in a mistaken fashion the older and more masculine methods, and aims at effects which, though allowable enough in clay or metal, are opposed to the whole character of woodwork. This "New Art" has made its influence felt both in England and on the Continent, and has led away the craftsmen into very strange paths. It borrows its character from bronze or cast-iron, and disregards the very genius of the material with which it has to deal.

It is, in fact, a hybrid production which is offensive by reason of its obvious artificiality, and irritating because it pretends to be what it is not.

Really, there is far more satisfaction to be derived from the Philistinism of such an artist in wood as Grinling Gibbons. His carvings were roccoco and over-florid in manner. They were by no means innocent of trickery, and they ran to excess in their management of realistic detail. But they were extremely well executed technically, and their redundancy, though it detracted somewhat from his credit as a designer, served certainly to display the marvellous fertility of his imagination and his great resourcefulness as a craftsman. That he holds deservedly a place of honour among the wood carvers who have made themselves famous in history is not to be denied, and his right to be reckoned as a master worthy of respect has not been diminished by modern changes of fashion. Fortunately, there still remain many of the best examples of his workmanship in mansions and public buildings in all parts of this country. They are invaluable as object-lessons in a craft which, by its very popularity, is a little too liable to be treated with some forgetfulness of its more serious responsibilities. He founded a school that for some time after his death carried on the essential principles of his art, and kept alive the tradition which he did so much to establish. When, however, the florid style of architecture of which it was an accompaniment gave way to something quieter and less extravagant in feeling, this tradition ceased to have any active influence, and to-day it is almost forgotten.

But with all its defects of taste the work of Grinling Gibbons and his imitators can be respected, because it was always carried out with an honest regard for structural exigencies, and because it has that charm of accomplishment which distinguishes all good carving. It was clean technically, and so its errors of judgment can be more easily forgiven than that fundamental misapprehension of the functions of the woodcarver's art, which is obvious in the productions of the "New



SCREEN IN DINING ROOM

CREWE HALL

WOOD PANELLING
FROM WALTHAM ABBEY

SOUTH KENSINGTON
MUSEUM

Art" school. There are dangerous possibilities in the development of this fashion thrust upon us to-day by designers who seem to fail in their perception of the difference between fresh originality and rank eccentricity, who miss, indeed, the best purpose of decoration in their laboured efforts to graft uncanny growths upon a stem which needs no such excrescences to enhance its natural perfection.

There is the more reason to regret these modern aberrations in this branch of design, because, despite the many additions which have been made to the list of materials available for domestic decoration, wood is still the one which must be relied upon for a number of indispensable adornments. In the architecture of the present day it has many duties to fulfil, and it offers to the carver an undiminished array of opportunities for showing his skill. The ceilings and wall panellings, the mantelpieces, the staircases, the screens, and the galleries, which were the delight of the house builders in past centuries, have their modern counterparts, and call for the same enrichments which were so lavishly applied in the old days. Wood carving is an eminently living art, and, therefore, there is the greater need that it should not be induced by bad advisers to do things discreditable to its honourable record. If it is to serve future generations as excellently as it has those that are dead and gone, it must be kept from wandering outside its legitimate sphere.

### Inlaying.

Next in importance to carving as a device for making wood-work ornamental comes inlaying. This is applied generally, though not invariably, to flat surfaces, and is used especially for friezes and wall panels. It admits of almost as much variety of treatment as is possible with carving, and it has the additional advantage of allowing the introduction of pleasant contrasts of colour. In furniture it has been

freely resorted to by designers of all periods, but it has been also turned to excellent account in mural decoration, sometimes as a substitute for carving, and sometimes in association with it. It offers special opportunities to the lover of complex patterns, as considerable freedom of line arrangement is quite permissible, and designs of a very elaborate kind can be produced with comparatively little difficulty. Very exact and careful craftsmanship is, of course, indispensable, for much of the success of this work depends upon the neatness and precision with which it is executed; any bungling or uncertainty would not only be unpleasantly evident, but would be likely to lead to disaster by allowing pieces of the inlay to become detached from the ground to which they had been applied.

The materials which are employed in inlaying are practically unlimited. The general custom is to carry out the design in woods of different colours upon a surface which contrasts with them sufficiently to make the pattern tell effectively. There is an excellent example of this mode of working in the panelled room from Sizergh Castle, which is now set up in the South Kensington Museum. In this the panels are of rich brown oak, ornamented with conventional patterns in holly wood and bog oak; the holly is used for the dominant lines, and the bog oak for the darker touches, which serve as accents. In some other old examples arbutus, which has a pleasant rosy tint, and ebony with its rich velvety black, can be found, and there are instances of the adaptation of many white woods by colouring them superficially to any desired tint. In recent years the range of suitable materials has been greatly increased by the importation of a host of foreign woods, wonderful in colour and astonishing in grain. By their assistance the modern inlayer has been enabled to attempt, often very successfully, effects that were scarcely dreamt of by his predecessors.

But it is by no means necessary to depend only upon woods of

various sorts. Ivory, tortoise-shell, and many metals can be let in safely enough into a wood panel, and can be combined with the most delicate ingenuity into patterns of the greatest beauty. The Japanese have a way of inlaying with ivory or bone, which is carved and coloured with delightful freedom ; and artists of other schools have achieved results worth attention by using metal in flat plates or in the form of wire, pieces of mother-of-pearl or iridescent shell, and occasionally minerals like malachite or lapislazuli. Such fanciful combinations, however, are rarely attempted in large decorative undertakings. They must be noted, because they show how little the art of inlaying is hampered by the lack of adaptable materials, and because the fact that some workers have found them suitable for certain effects has an interest to

INLAID PANELLING FROM SIZERGH CASTLE.

others who may wish to strike out for themselves in new directions.

There is, indeed, no reason why this manner of ornamenting woodwork should not be much more freely adopted. It is, perhaps, too delicate, both in its technical qualities and its results, for the decoration of the wide wall surfaces of a large room, but it would suit itself well enough to those smaller details which in the domestic architecture of the present day need to be dealt with lightly and fancifully. Good authorities for all modes of handling are plentiful, for the art is an old one, and has been practised by most nations; the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, and most of the Eastern peoples were well versed in its technicalities; it was known to the Italians; and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was perfected and widened in scope by several famous French craftsmen. By the aid of modern machinery the necessary materials can be admirably prepared, and exactness of fitting and accuracy in execution can be ensured; therefore results which were in the old days attainable only by infinite labour and rare dexterity of touch can be secured with comparative ease.

### Burnt Wood Work.

Another art which by a different method produces something of the appearance of inlaying is that known as pyrography. Mechanically it is extremely simple, for it is nothing more than a process of drawing upon wood with a metal point heated sufficiently to char the surface. Designs drawn in this way have a good effect, as they contrast pleasantly with the lighter colour of the ground, and are susceptible of vigorous and telling treatment. Of course they are in monochrome, as the charring merely darkens the natural tint of the wood, but by clever use of the metal point a surprising amount of gradation and shading can be obtained, and subtleties of tone which rival those of painting are by no means impossible. Necessarily, success in the art depends largely upon the

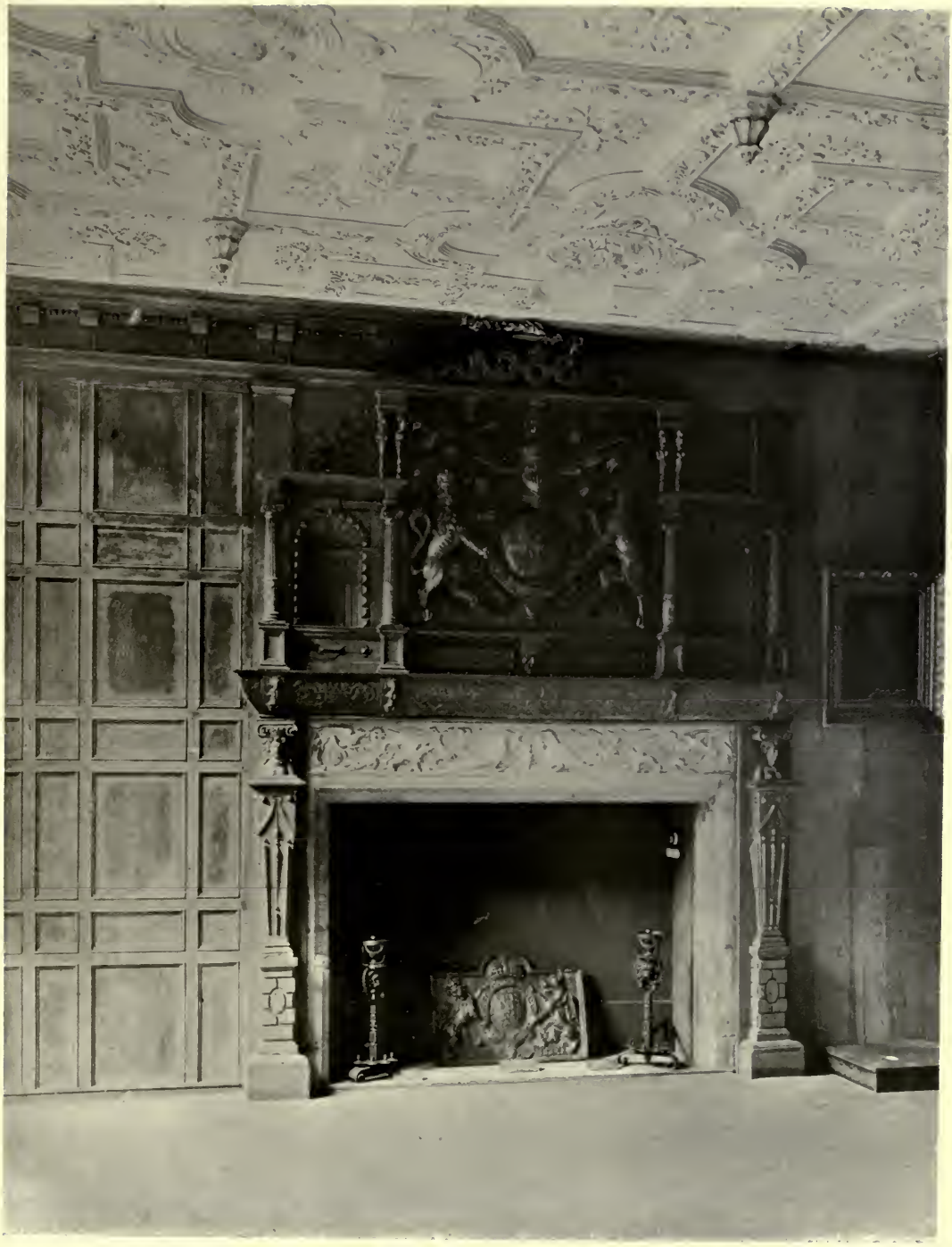
capacity of the worker to manage his tools with delicate judgment, but when he has once got them under proper control there are no other technical secrets which he must master.

Pyrography, or poker work as it is popularly called, is no recent discovery, indeed it ranks among the most ancient of the decorative devices known to primitive peoples. Its freedom from mechanical difficulties, the ease with which the necessary materials can be procured, and the chances it offers to the ingenious manipulator have all contributed to its widespread popularity. At the same time they have led to its employment in unworthy ways, and to the production of a vast number of things which very imperfectly illustrate its capabilities. It has fallen too often into the hands of the unpractised designer, endowed with neither the knowledge nor the power to deal with it seriously, and his inability has caused it to be regarded as a somewhat barbaric form of Art only adapted for rough effects, and more suited for the amateur than the skilful craftsman. Its popularity has for these reasons failed in a measure to give it the prominent place among decorative methods to which it is honestly entitled.

There is, indeed, a hint of disrespect in its name. "Poker work" suggests a rough and ready manner of handling which hardly seems to promise anything very delicate or refined in the way of results. But the implements classed as pokers were not, even in the old days, limited to the familiar articles of household use. Special steel pins of various sizes were pressed into service, and though occasionally a large iron might be required for singeing or charring broad surfaces in the design, all the more minute touches were put in with tools small enough for the daintiest of line work. Recent inventions, however, have provided in the place of these steel pins a number of appliances which allow to the artist who wishes to adopt the burnt wood process almost as much freedom as he has in drawing upon paper with pencil and chalk. The points which char

the wood are made now of platinum kept constantly at the right degree of heat by a stream of benzoline vapour or even by electricity, and the uncertainty which attended the management of steel tools heated in a fire has been entirely done away with. With such aids the most exact lines and the most tender gradations can be imprinted on the wood, and the risk of failure from imperfect mechanism need no longer be taken into account.

Under these working conditions the art acquires an importance which it can scarcely be said to have possessed before. There are many kinds of ornamentation to which it can be readily adapted, and as it has inherently the advantages of permanence, pleasantness of appearance, and cheapness, there is no reason why it should not be applied to a large number of decorative purposes which have not hitherto come within its range. Where carving is unsuitable and inlaying too costly, burnt patterns would be thoroughly efficient substitutes. Their quietness of effect is a valuable quality in domestic decoration, as they diversify plain surfaces without claiming an undue amount of attention; and the fact that they are indelible and will last as long as the wood itself commends them to the appreciation of all workers who are in search of a mode of expression that is really trustworthy. The one thing requisite is that the men who do the work should be properly qualified designers not likely to be led away by the responsiveness of the method into reckless disregard of correct principles. There is in the readiness with which subtleties of tone can be realised a temptation, to which many workers have succumbed, to try for pictorial effects which are, strictly speaking, undecorative; and in this temptation lies one of the chief dangers which threaten the development of poker work. For pattern designing it is admirably fitted, but as a medium for the production of pictures it never can be anything but unsatisfactory.

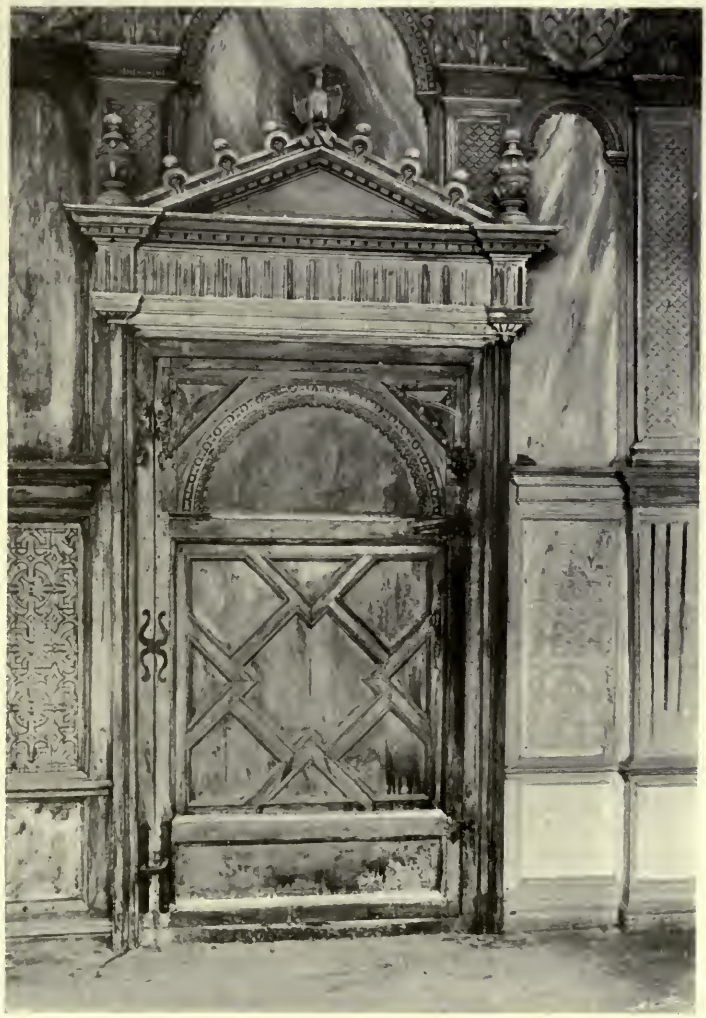


OAK PANELLING, FIREPLACE AND CEILING
FROM BROMLEY PALACE

SOUTH KENSINGTON
MUSEUM

## Ornamental Carpentry.

Although there is such a considerable choice of ways in which woodwork can be treated, it is perfectly possible to do without any of them and to trust simply to a judicious arrangement of structural lines to bring about a quite acceptable result. In wall panelling, by varying the framing, by using mouldings of different sections, by dividing the spaces with pilasters or with well defined horizontal lines, and by the introduction of such architectural details as can be properly constructed in wood, an endless number of effects can be obtained without any departure from the strict proprieties of design. It is easy for a clever artificer to carry out the intentions of an architect who understands the right management of raw material, and to make the fittings of a room



THE PEACOCK DOOR IN THE BALL ROOM AT HADDON HALL

artistically interesting solely by the way in which they are fashioned and put together.

Of this class of ornamental carpentry there is a host of old and modern instances. The room from Sizergh Castle, which has been already mentioned, is quite as worthy of attention as a piece of ingenious construction as it is for the beauty of the inlaying in the panels. It is typical of a great deal of the work of a few centuries ago when the use of wood for wall linings and ceilings was almost universal in the larger houses, and it is valuable as a subject of study for the present-day designer who wishes to gain credit as a man learned in the technicalities of his profession. That the modern workers have profited by the example of their predecessors is certainly true. In much of the domestic decoration for which firms like Liberty and Company, and the Warings, to quote a few out of a large number, are responsible, there is apparent often enough a quite sincere intention to rival the most memorable of the older performances in solidity of construction and variety of treatment. The last few years have seen a very definite renewal of the taste for such ornamentation, and a marked improvement in the manner of its application.

As an example of constructive woodwork which is both unusual in appearance and admirable in execution, the house of Mr. Mortimer Menpes, at Chelsea, may fairly be instanced. This house provides a very instructive illustration of the manner in which a man possessed of true artistic originality can adapt the characteristics of a national style so as to fit them to his own idea without in any way stultifying them or making them seem incongruous in application. He has chosen to give to his rooms a Japanese aspect, and he has succeeded in doing this not by making a mere copy of Japanese architecture, but by inventing a decorative scheme which would allow him to give to a London interior the atmosphere of the East. All the details of the

STUDIO AND DRAWING ROOM

MORTIMER MENPES

ornamentation come from Japan, they were chiefly made, in accordance with his designs, by native craftsmen, and were brought by him to England ready for putting into the places previously assigned to them. Consequently, the effect of the work as a whole is consistent and orderly; there is in it no jumbling together of the odds and ends acquired by a collector on his travels; but instead, a logical expression of a deliberate intention to reproduce the spirit of a graceful and picturesque style.

It is especially as a piece of admirable joinery that the fitting up of this house is so significant. There is a certain amount of typical Japanese carving introduced as panels in the doors, walls, and ceilings; there is some use made of contrasts of colour and of touches of gilding which brighten the general effect; but the chief charm of the decoration comes from the clever framing of the panelling, and from the delicate construction of the pierced ornament and lattice work by which many of the spaces are filled. The carvings and the notes of colour are, of course, valuable in the completion of the optical effect; but they only amplify an artistic scheme which is, in a sense, complete without them. Mr. Menpes, in his planning of the whole thing, and in his control over the workers who have carried out his intentions, has clearly kept in view the advantage of maintaining absolute purity of construction. For this reason designers can with advantage study his achievement. Its frankness and absence of all structural affectation entitle it to respect, and its technical merit is worthy of high praise. Through it all runs that correct appreciation of fundamental principles of artistic practice which is the best possible source of decorative inspiration.

One great improvement in modern taste shows itself in the revival of the conviction that wood as a material is most acceptable in its natural state. Originally decorative wood-work was left untouched, except, perhaps, for a slight rubbing with oil to give it a scarcely perceptible polish. But some years ago a tasteless fashion for colouring it sprang

up, and some of the most beautiful pieces of craftsmanship were ruthlessly hidden beneath many coats of oil paint, and robbed almost irretrievably of all their characteristic charm. People seemed to have forgotten, in a craze for spick-and-span newness, that there was in old wood, seasoned by long exposure to the air, a play of colour and a beauty of surface texture that far surpassed in artistic value anything which the most accomplished wielder of the paint brush could give. But while the fashion lasted it was almost universal, and its evil influence persisted into comparatively recent times. That it should at last have died out is a matter for the heartiest rejoicing. Its disappearance—it is to be hoped, for ever—has left the way open for the designer to use his selective capacities to help him in combining and arranging natural harmonies of a fascinating kind. He can gain his effects now, not only by the excellence of his carpentry, but by the originality and judgment he shows in juxtaposing woods which vary greatly in tint and grain; and the more ingenious his contrivance the surer is it of general approval.

THE CARVED PARLOUR

CREWE HALL

# SECTION VII.

## MIXED METHODS.

Although in analysing the methods of the decorator it is more convenient to classify the different forms of technical practice under separate headings, it is scarcely possible to make such exact distinctions in any consideration of the wider applications of decorative art. It is often a difficult matter to decide what is the particular class to which a certain piece of work should be assigned, because the visible result has been arrived at by a combination of executive devices, no one of which can be said to outweigh the others in importance. But this very difficulty adds a real interest to the study of decoration. There is a great fascination in the process of dissection to which a composite and intricate art must be submitted before the means by which it has been built up can be understood; a fascination which arises from the absence of any obvious regulations that confine the worker within hard and fast limits.

Indeed, in most of the habitual forms of artistic expression, the boundaries within which the executant is permitted to exercise himself are always very visible, and if he attempts to stray beyond them he is very quickly called to account and punished for his presumption. The picture painter who tries to do with his paints and brushes anything that the traditional masters of his craft have not accomplished, or the sculptor who strives after a realism that the customary applications of marble or

bronze will not give, is told in no questionable terms that he is a heretic, sinning grievously against all the canons of the creed to which he owes absolute obedience. To dream of welding together different kinds of mechanism, so that by their union something more comprehensive and satisfying can be obtained, is forbidden to the ordinary artist. He must be a specialist in one line or another, and if he aspires to be a universal genius he must expect to be ignored as something outside the pale.

But the decorator is not such a slave as this to technical tradition. In his work combinations that are surprising and effects that are unusual may fairly be said to be not only legitimate but even advisable. It is his duty to seek out new ways of putting together the materials available for the artist's use, for it is in unexpected arrangements that he shows the extent of his originality and the depth of his imagination. If he ambles gently along in a well-worn track, and does simply what all the others have done who have passed that way before him, he has no right to expect recognition as a man of mark. He may be accepted as a good workman who can safely be entrusted with commonplace undertakings, but he will never stir the public pulse by his inventiveness, or earn any lasting fame by the novelty of his methods.

It follows, then, that breadth of study and readiness of resource are indispensables in the equipment of the designer who hopes to take rank among the chiefs of his profession. The more extensive his knowledge the better will be his performance and the greater his chance of adding appreciably to the common stock of decorative achievement. Even if in his own practice he confines himself to one branch of ornament this comprehensiveness of training is none the less valuable, for it will help him to find the direct road to success in the particular work that he undertakes. It will save him from being a man of one method, and from labouring to produce by an inappropriate device results which are easily attainable in another way. He will never be hampered by

THE BEDROOM OF THE EMPRESS — CHATEAU DE COMPIÈGNE

uncertainty about the choice of suitable materials, because he will have gained by experience a correct idea of the manner in which they will serve him best.

Fortunately, the modern decorator has a practically unlimited array of standard authorities available for his guidance. The whole range of design is open to him, and there is scarcely any direction in which he cannot gather information that he can profit by in his own practice. The record of Art in all ages and all countries is as it were a text book from which he can derive hints invaluable in their suggestions of new modes of treatment and of fresh readings of the older truths. In the present day the narrow man who binds himself to observe the ancient limits of this or that craft is either a pedant wilfully blind to his great opportunities or a half educated beginner who has never advanced beyond the first stages of his profession, and has no knowledge of the meaning of the facts which he pretends to have learned. At the best he can never be anything but a copyist and an imitator, strong and individual accomplishment is the last thing to be hoped for from him.

But clearly it is impossible, in considering work which has been carried out with due regard for modern opportunities and modern necessities, to use forms of criticism which are applicable to arts of less far-reaching character. The customary comments on details of technical practice must be subordinated to a more general estimate of the value of the designer's performance as a whole. It is interesting, of course, to make an analysis and to see what is the nature of the combination by which he has arrived at his result; but, if this result is artistically excellent and decoratively sound, audacity in the means employed must be praised rather than blamed. There must be no complaining about the difficulty of finding the right category in which to place an achievement that is by its very nature incapable of strict classification. It must be viewed in its largest aspect and judged generally rather

than particularly; and the ultimate effect of the series of operations must be criticised, not the separate stages by which it has been reached.

As an instance of what may be called misconceived criticism the cry which has been raised against the decoration of St. Paul's Cathedral is worth a reference. It is interesting because it has united in a common cause a number of purists who are not often found in association. Yet there is no real agreement among them even in this general expression of Sir W. B. Richmond's disapproval. Some object to mosaics because they are Byzantine in character and so not strictly in accord with the style of the building, others accept the character of the designs but attack the method of execution, and others again find no fault with the mosaics themselves but complain vehemently about the gilding of the stonework and the ornamenting of the details of the architecture with touches of colour. None of these critics seem to have taken into consideration the fact that they are not viewing a great scheme with any approach to a right understanding of its meaning. They are like those stupid people who complain that a picture looks rough and unfinished when they examine it with a magnifying glass; that it is perfectly smooth and complete when seen as a whole and at the right distance is a thing they never discover.

An attitude of this sort is, however, so often assumed with regard to decorative undertakings that it is necessary to insist upon the designer's right to be judged by the sum total of his efforts and not by incidents in his method. To dissect any of his productions is legitimate enough, but the purpose of the dissection must be either to find out by what ingenious combination of devices he has achieved a success or to discover the mistake that has caused his failure. When, as in the decoration of St. Paul's, the general result is excellently satisfying and impressive, the man who carps at minor details merely stamps himself as a pedant wanting in breadth of mind and without any real largeness of vision.

DESIGN IN PAINTED PLASTER AND WOOD — G. M. ELLWOOD

Really the only way in which any classification of ornamental works can be made is by grouping together those that have been produced without the assistance of one or other of the recognised executive processes. There are some in which painting plays no part, others in which the sculptor has not intervened, others, again, which have made no demands upon the skill of the worker in wood or in ceramic materials. They meet, of course, on the common ground that they are, or should be, all adjuncts to architecture; but some fulfil this mission directly and immediately, and others more or less remotely. Still, whether the connection is close or distant, it is always present, and it furnishes the chapter heading under which all kinds of decorative practice stand as sub-sections. The control of the architect is not necessarily an obvious one which denies to the designers opportunities for the exercise of their own independent fancy, but it is none the less real. At all events he provides the spaces which the decorators have to fill; and he is in a degree responsible for the mechanical conditions which make possible some attempt to tabulate the various forms of mural decoration, for his intention usually determines the character of the ornament which must be applied to the building that he has designed.

One of the largest classes is that which includes the many ways of treating flat surfaces without recourse to modelling or relief work. In this case the method usually followed is to use painting for the most important details in the main scheme, and to enhance these paintings by surrounding them with a setting which will show them off to the best advantage. Sometimes, as in many of the Italian palaces decorated with frescoes, everything else is subordinated to the great pictorial designs which cover all the available space in walls and ceilings, and nothing is introduced which could even to the smallest extent detract from their importance. But more often the painter is depended upon to fill panels or friezes which are made the accents in an elaborate system of

PORTION OF A FRIEZE

ornamentation; and occasionally his share in the work is reduced to the smallest proportions, and becomes nothing more than a secondary interest in an undertaking which would be almost as interesting without his assistance.

As a notable example of the manner in which painting can be applied as an accessory in a general arrangement, a room recently decorated by Mr. Brangwyn in a house at Lansdowne Road, Notting Hill, deserves to be quoted. In this the idea was to produce a combination which would be suitable to a domestic interior, and to gain an effect which would be full of variety and yet, as a whole, quiet and delicate. The walls are covered with brown paper, and divided into panels by strips of woodwork which run from the skirting to the frieze. This frieze is painted with figures in a broadly treated landscape, in shades of blue and flesh colour,

FRANK BRANGWYN

and the same tints, with the addition of touches of rosy pink, are introduced into some small panels which break the formal lines of the upright strips. The cornice of the ceiling is a darker blue; and for all the woodwork, including the doors and an overmantel, unpolished cherry-wood is used. In this surrounding, gradated in tones of warm brown, the greys and blues of the paintings tell exactly at their right value. They gain by contrast, and yet so skilfully are they harmonised that they do not detach themselves from the general colour scheme, nor do they contradict the artist's intention to avoid everything which might lead to want of repose. Among the best instances of the adaptability of the modern designer this characteristic achievement claims especial attention. It has eminently the qualities which come from clever

MORRIS DINING ROOM SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM

combination of materials, and it is marked by delightful individuality and perfect taste.

Another, and more accessible, example of the use of painted details to enliven a colour scheme is to be found in the South Kensington Museum. One of the three refreshment rooms there—a harmony in low tones of green—is adorned with dado and ceiling panels of figures and floral patterns, for some of which Sir Edward Burne Jones is said to have been responsible, under the direction of William Morris. Without these incidental notes of bright and contrasting colour the room would have seemed too heavy and sombre; but, as it is, just sufficient variety is given to make it pleasantly rich and sumptuous without any departure from decorative proprieties. These two instances may be taken as types;

they are important because in each case the services of an artist of great repute have been obtained, and because both show plainly a personal and original method rather than a merely traditional mode of treatment.

But such cases, in which the personality of the artist is felt throughout the whole scheme, are comparatively rare. More often his assistance is sought when much of the accessory decoration has been completed by someone else, and then all he can do is to make the best of whatever opportunities have been left for him. This division of responsibility does not always produce the happiest results. It brings about discordances, like those which appear at the Royal Exchange — he work that is being done there is not so much true decoration as an instance of fitting in easel pictures into spaces not specially adapted to receive them—or it leads to something like effacement of the flat paintings by the restlessness of the surroundings, as may be seen in far too many of the gorgeous interiors which may be taken as standard examples of French taste. In these the combination of methods is ill-balanced and the conflict of a multiplicity of convictions is unpleasantly apparent. As a broad generalisation it may be said that where any serious pictorial ornamentation is used the most agreeable effect will be secured by simplifying as far as possible the character of the setting and by avoiding distracting juxtapositions.

PANEL, IN DINING ROOM, SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM — SIR E. BURNE JONES

When more than ordinary sumptuousness of aspect is desired, it will be better to try another kind of combination, and to depend upon relief work for the principal facts of the design, and upon painting for the accentuation only of the modelled forms. The sculptor then becomes the most active agent, and the painter takes a comparatively unimportant position. Occasionally, as in the collaboration of Mr. Gerald Moira and Mr. F. L. Jenkins, there is an equal division of responsibility; but more often it rests almost entirely upon the man who prepares the carved or modelled ornament. When the Greeks or the Egyptians applied colour to sculpture, they did so with many reservations, and followed definite conventions which admitted of little realism. They worked by rules which did not take into account the personal preferences of the colourist; he could have been little more than an assistant acting under orders.

The place which coloured sculpture occupies in the list of mixed methods is in some respects peculiar. As a form of decorative art, it has been called into existence by the feeling that flat painting, on the one hand, has limitations which make it unsuitable under some conditions, and that sculpture plain and unadorned is, on the other, a little too chill and formal for the complete satisfaction of the popular taste. Hence the creation of a hybrid device, which has a share of the characteristics of both its parents. The shapes in which it appears are numerous and varied. Coloured plaster is, perhaps, the most familiar of the modern ways of using it, but there are others, like the Della Robbia and other ceramic reliefs, the combinations of coloured metals, and the mixtures of marble or terra cotta with mosaic, which have ample authority, both on the score of ancient usage, and because they are artistically agreeable. Polychromatic reliefs can be treated in so many ways that their popularity in all ages is not surprising.

Yet the functions of sculpture pure and simple are important enough

FLEMISH WOOD CARVING AND
PAINTED FRIEZE

THE FRIEZE BY
H. C. BREWER

to put it among the chief of the available means of amplifying an architectural design. Wherever the diversifying of plain spaces by effects of light and shade is desired, it is invaluable; and, whether it is executed in marble, stone, or bronze, its large dignity of manner suffices to make it always splendidly decorative. Uncoloured, and uncombined with accessory ornaments, it is peculiarly suited for external use; and it can be associated in interiors with woodwork or ceramic materials without suffering an eclipse of its finer qualities. In this pure form it is, however, hardly to be classed as one of the mixed methods of enriching buildings; it stands alone, and needs no assistance from other arts.

Another medium which frequently keeps free from other associations is mosaic. Its principal employment is for filling panels and friezes, the spandrels between arches, and other spaces which are intended for coloured ornamentation. In these instances it serves simply as a substitute for painting, to which it is preferred on account of its permanence and indestructibility. But it is used sometimes as a background for sculptured reliefs; and latterly it has become popular in domestic decoration as an accessory in elaborately detailed adornments. It is in such cases combined with coloured marbles, or even surrounded with woodwork; it may have a setting of modelled plaster; or it may be juxtaposed with wrought metal. In public buildings where it can be treated on a large scale its pictorial possibilities are best displayed; in private houses it is better adapted for conventional designs which do not need to be carried to any high degree of surface finish. It has, however, one peculiarity which tends to restrict the freedom of the executant—that it becomes less pleasing the more minutely it is worked, and therefore it cannot well be reduced in scale of handling in proportion to any great diminution in the size of the spaces that it has to cover. When it is used in small quantities and among other materials, it will never be really satisfactory unless it is simple in style and large in manner. Littleness of

execution always destroys its effectiveness, and makes it disagreeable in quality; and minute complexity of pattern is wholly unsuited to its technical character.

Where the exigencies of a particular decorative design make necessary anything like high finish, painted ceramics can be substituted for mosaic. They combine well with all sorts of architectural arrangements, and can be fitted into many kinds of settings. Tiles especially, either in plain colours or painted with pictorial and other designs, play a part of real importance in modern domestic ornament; and porcelain plaques delicately treated by artists of considerable repute are far from uncommon as prominent features in fanciful schemes. Indeed, ceramic work, whether painted or modelled, seems by its nature to have a special adaptability and to bear association well with most of the decorative materials. It has advantages of colour and texture which give it a right to serious consideration on artistic grounds, and it offers to the designer opportunities for varied expression that are more than ordinarily valuable. Though it does not rival mosaic as a medium for sumptuous wall decorations on a large scale, it will serve better for those little touches by which the aspect of the present-day house is made attractive, and for the incidental enrichments which the domestic architect is always anxious to introduce into his work.

There is another way of ornamenting surfaces which is in its mechanism akin both to mosaic and tile work, inasmuch as it is a superficial application of coloured materials by which the structural stonework is concealed. Marble veneering, a decorative device practised with much ingenuity and success by the Italians and other nations in past centuries, has been retained by modern craftsmen as a means of obtaining rich results by the use of natural substances. In this work slabs of marble or alabaster are fixed to the wall without being built into it as part of the construction of the building. They are arranged

PAINTED PANELS IN FRIEZE
PRINCE'S HOTEL

H. C. BREWER

so as to produce harmonies or contrasts of colour in which a certain beauty of accidental effect comes from the veining of the marble and form the unexpected combinations characteristic of the material. In the hands of an artist who understands its possibilities this mode of decoration is capable of a great variety of applications, and it can be used with equal success for the most delicate and the most sumptuous kind of ornamentation.

In this country, however, polished marble is not often employed externally. It does not, in a moist atmosphere, stand exposure to the weather, and is apt to lose its beauty of surface and to decay quickly. It is chiefly reserved for interiors, for the entrance halls and staircases of public and private buildings which are important enough to call for special treatment. There are excellent examples in the grand staircase of the National Liberal Club and the entrance hall of the Constitutional Club; and others may be found in several of the great hotels which have been built in London during recent years. In private houses the material appears rarely enough in living rooms; except for an isolated thing like a mantelpiece it does not commend itself to the domestic decorator who has to adapt his methods to the demands of present day existence. There is a certain chilly suggestion about marble as a wall covering which makes it inappropriate for rooms in which people sit or rest, and it is the consciousness of this suggestion that in this climate limits the use of all such polished substances to those parts of a house in which cleanliness rather than comfort is desired.

But in public buildings this personal objection to the material does not apply. They have to be decorated with special consideration for the permanence of the ornamentation, and those limitations which are natural enough in purely domestic work do not need to be so closely observed. Therefore, coloured marbles are freely introduced by the modern architect whenever he has to deal with an interior which needs

to be given a more than ordinary stateliness of appearance. Sometimes he makes them accessories in a scheme which includes the use of wall paintings, or mosaics, or of reliefs in stone or bronze; but often he depends simply upon the beauty of the marble itself for the decorative effects at which he aims.

How well this kind of work will satisfy many of the conditions which affect the character of modern decoration can be seen at the Imperial Theatre, Westminster. The interior of this building has recently been re-modelled, and the walls of the auditorium have been faced with a creamy white marble faintly veined with grey. A few ornamental details in dull gold are relieved against the marble surface, and the hangings and upholstery are carried out in a subdued shade of green, with gold embroidery sparingly applied. The whole arrangement is quiet and dignified, and yet it is lacking neither in richness of colour nor in that quality of spectacular effect which seems specially appropriate in a play-house. Above all, there is nothing either in the colour scheme chosen, or in the combination of materials, which calls the attention of the spectator away from the stage. The decoration can be heartily commended, because it is right in its relations and properly fulfils its particular purposes. Much of its charm comes, however, from the effectiveness of the marble veneering—from the use of a wall covering which is exquisite both in texture and in play of subtle tints, and yet so reticent that it does not in any way fail in its mission as a background devised to set off the gayer details which are the accents of the design.

It would not be difficult to make a long list of other examples of the way in which the decorator has profited by his opportunities and has turned to good account the most diverse and dissimilar materials. The tendency is increasingly towards the widest possible appreciation of the advantages that come from disregard of unnecessary conventions and regulations by which the worker's freedom of action might be hampered;

and one of the best results of this tendency appears in the fortunate combinations which give character and interest to modern accomplishment. There is much less limitation of activity than there was in the old days, and consequently less subservience to a temporary fashion in technique. In bygone centuries particular decorative arts were referable to particular periods, or were the product of certain local conditions or of the preferences of individual artists. Groups of craftsmen imitated one another and created momentary traditions which, for the time being, made comprehensiveness of practice almost impossible. That there is to-day no inclination of the lesser men to follow in the wake of their more original fellow workers would be perhaps too much to assert, but at least there is evident a more general desire than there used to be to depend upon personal capacity rather than an aptitude for acquiring at second-hand the ideas of the leaders of the profession.

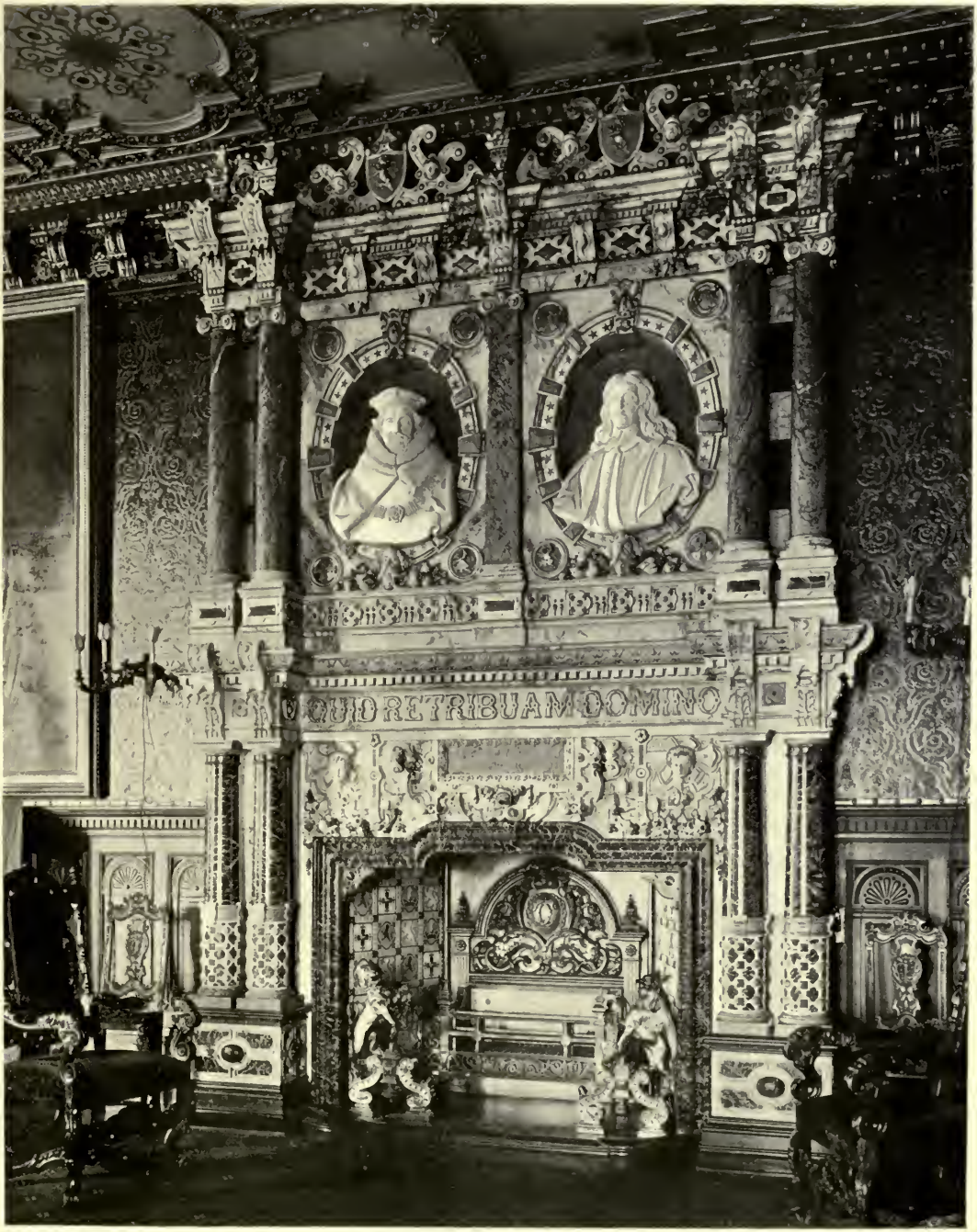
Out of this desire comes that admirable development of technical methods which is one of the greatest merits of modern design. There is a constant competition between the craftsmen of the better type to find ways of expressing themselves that have not been used before, and though this competition has led at times to extravagance, and has been answerable for a certain amount of artistic excess, it has, on the whole, done much to enlarge the scope of decoration and to improve the public taste. It has brought about a wholesome appreciation of the advantage that is to be gained by the freest handling of all the materials which are at the disposal of the designer; it has opened up possibilities of successful achievement which may fairly be said to be boundless; and it has cleared away a vast number of pedantic misconceptions which have been allowed too long to stand in the way of the honest seekers after the higher truths of æstheticism.

# SECTION VIII.

## TASTE IN DECORATION.

It will not be out of place to add to this account of the technical processes by which decorative results are obtained some speculations concerning the principles that should guide the designer in the practice of his profession. It is not by mere skill of hand, nor by the ingenuity with which he can apply materials, that he can hope to justify his claim to a place among the great decorators who have made history; he must have other qualities to help him in his development. That his equipment of capacities should include originality of feeling, constructive knowledge, and a sense both of proportion and combination, is plainly necessary; but to keep all these in their right relation he must be blessed with a full share of that quality, difficult to define, which is known as taste.

It is this, indeed, which gives to his work the individual atmosphere that makes it interesting. The materials at his disposal and the technical methods which he must use are common property, and as accessible to the mere journeyman worker as they are to the greatest master of decorative art. Any man of average intelligence can learn the rules and traditions of the craft; there are no trade secrets jealously guarded from the ordinary enquirer, and only imparted to the members of a limited fraternity sworn to maintain mysteries which have been




FIREPLACE
IN THE LONG GALLERY

CREWE HALL

handed down from generation to generation. Anyone who likes can compete with him on his own ground and can enjoy the same practical advantages that he does.

But when taste of the right kind is brought to bear upon the choice and arrangement of decorative details the results of the artist's working become infinitely more characteristic and valuable than they could ever be made by simple observance of rules or by following conventions of long standing. By the aid of this quality he is enabled to exercise to the fullest extent his inclinations towards new forms of expression. It will guide him through all kinds of difficulties, and put him in the right track when he is making experiments for which there is little or no precedent. He can be as free as he pleases in his adaptation of technicalities, startlingly original in his application of artistic ideas, and as audacious as possible in his management of the materials with which he has to deal; his instinct will tell him what to do and what to avoid.

Where especially it will serve him is in keeping him from those errors which mark the designer who does things without knowing what they mean or where they will lead. He will not commit that especially grave fault, which is, unfortunately, too common in decoration, of disregarding the structural meaning of ornament; and he will not try to carry the treatment of accessories beyond what is necessary for the enrichment of the main architectural design. Neither will he fail in that other most important matter, the adjustment of the details to the space which has to be covered so that there may be a right balance between the parts decorated and those left untouched. One of the worst signs of the want of correct taste is the tendency to over-elaboration and to restlessness of arrangement. It is unluckily a very perceptible defect in the work of the lesser men of all schools and periods, and is accountable for much of the disfavour with which certain styles of ornament are viewed by modern critics.

Why this quality of discreet management is so essential to the decorator will be evident enough to all people who realise the nature of his occupation and the conditions under which he has to work. He is not like the picture painter who can gain and hold popular attention by choosing subjects that are generally interesting, or by representing with imitative dexterity those little facts of nature with which everyone is familiar. He has no concern with literary incident, and realism in the pictorial sense is forbidden to him. His productions cannot be hung on the line at the Royal Academy to claim the notice of the sightseers who are sublimely indifferent to the artistic merit of what is presented to them and ask only for a moderate amount of truth to nature. All the easy roads to fame are closed because he cannot gloss over incompetence of craftsmanship by playing upon emotions which are almost entirely unæsthetic.

But for this very reason it is the more necessary that he should be naturally fitted for his task. His only hope of securing proper recognition depends upon his ability to prove that the knowledge he has of his art is without a flaw, and that he can use it with consummate discretion. He must make his way by the sheer weight of his individuality, slowly and steadily, and never dream of bringing the world to his feet by some surprising accomplishment. Sensationalism, indeed, is forbidden to him. If he descends to it an immediate deterioration in his taste is inevitable because he will be concerning himself not with considerations of art practice, but with a false idea that he can get himself talked about by doing what is unexpected. No man who values his credit as a decorator can afford to employ expedients which will destroy his judgment and diminish his capacity for handling the greater problems of his profession.

It is decidedly a matter for congratulation that the position of the decorative artist should be unlike that of the picture painters. He is

PLASTER DECORATION IN HALL

THE CATALDI PALACE

THE DRAWING ROOM
EASTNOR CASTLE

at least not exposed to the pernicious influence of exhibitions which has affected so prejudicially the bulk of modern pictorial art. At the present moment the art gallery is a kind of arena in which painters of all sorts and conditions are engaged in an undignified scramble for popularity. Each one is trying to produce something which will by absolute insistence force itself upon the attention of the passers-by; and the one idea which possesses the crowd is that of reckless competition. Under such circumstances the danger that the better artistic principles may be forgotten in the turmoil of contending workers is very real and very urgent. The canvases that appear in the exhibitions are planned and executed chiefly with a view to the effect that they will produce in a pack of discordant things. They must be strident and assertive, strong enough to kill whatever happens to be placed beside them, and if they fulfil this condition their main mission may be said to be accomplished. Incidentally, perhaps, they may have merits as works of art; but this is by no means essential if only they are equal to the occasion when they appear at the Academy or some other show.

The decorator has no need to trouble himself about the consequences of any such incongruous juxtaposition. His work is not for exhibition in the sense that it is destined to face the ordeal of exposure in a public gallery, and so it has not to fight for recognition against unscrupulous rivalry. Therefore, there is no excuse for any effort to obtain startling effects by illegitimate means; and no worker is justified in adopting the mistaken idea that he must be eccentric or unusual if he is to hold his own against the other men who can be reckoned as his competitors If he is really a sincere artist, his instincts would rebel against such a misuse of his capacities; only under an absolute misapprehension could he be induced to depart from those æsthetic proprieties which, by the nature of his vocation, he is bound strictly to observe.

It must never be forgotten that decoration is essentially an art which

appeals to the senses rather than to the intelligence. Primarily its function is to please the eye by providing in the surroundings of everyday life a relief from the dulness and want of variety which are inevitable when mere utilitarianism is made the guiding principle of existence. The beauty of fitness which belongs unquestionably to things exactly adapted to their particular purpose is not sufficient to satisfy the æsthetic emotions. It needs to be amplified with decorative additions, and to be embroidered with an artistic overlaying, to render it acceptable to civilised humanity. But this embroidery must be judiciously managed; it must rather accentuate than disguise the structure to which it is applied, and must take its chief meaning from the forms on which it is based. The effect that it should have upon the observer ought to be restful and satisfying; it ought not to rouse him to wonder or excite any feeling of speculation as to the meaning of what is set before him. If a scheme of decoration presents puzzles for solution, and has to be elaborately thought out by anyone who wants to understand it, there is assuredly some want of continuity in its arrangement, or some serious defect in the designer's method.

At the same time there is no reason why there should not be matter for thought in the details which are put together to make the whole scheme complete. A wall painting, for instance, which is the centre and focus of a complicated design, may be quite appropriately treated in such a manner that it needs a good deal of thinking out; it may be symbolical, fanciful, or historical, full of splendid imagination like the frescoes of Raphael, or delicately trivial like the panels of Fragonard and Watteau, but it will not interfere with the unity of the system of ornamentation of which it forms part, if the relation it bears to the accessory work is rightly adjusted. Some sacrifice of purely pictorial effect must be made to fit it into its surroundings, and some special care must be taken to prevent it from seeming out of keeping with the rest of the designer's work; but

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PALACE OF FONTAINEBLEAU

SALON IN THE KING OF BAVARIA'S CASTLE, CHIEMSEE

a man with correct taste will rarely be in doubt as to the extent to which this accommodation should be carried. He will never forget that it is by the net result of his efforts that he must be judged, not by particular and individual parts.

The quality of restfulness is pre-eminently desirable in domestic decoration. The ornamentation of a house has to serve as a sort of background to the lives of the people who occupy the rooms, and it ought therefore to have a quiet appropriateness, and a decorous reserve; if it asserts itself or claims an undue amount of attention it is wanting in some of its chief essentials and is untrue to its best traditions. In a really well decorated house the ornament, as such, should never make its presence felt; it should produce an agreeable atmosphere of artistic refinement, perfectly equable and consistent, but the observer, unless he sets himself deliberately to analyse the means by which the effect is produced, should not be conscious of the various details. He should not be forced to notice the cleverness of the craftsmen who have been employed upon the work; he should not be persuaded to pick out this or that bit and to wonder at its originality of treatment or perfection of finish; he should feel, instead, sufficient contentment with his surroundings to be disinclined either for analysis or enquiry. It is by this power to suit itself to different moods that the adaptability of a decorative scheme to the necessary conditions of domestic work can best be estimated. Its reticence is the source of its success.

In a public building, however, with its more ample proportions and greater spaces, a richer and more sumptuous style of adornment is permissible. It is not a place in which people live, nor one where they require something in the way of a surrounding which will accord with their individualities of temperament, so it can be treated with greater freedom of manner than a purely domestic interior. The decoration can be made more obviously independent as an artistic effort, and need not be so

strictly considered as a background. But the artist is not by this enlarging of his scope relieved of the obligation to keep all the parts of his work in proper harmony. In a sense, perhaps, his responsibility is increased for he has to deal with bigger masses and more definite effects, and is exposed to serious temptations to run into extravagance. The delicacy of touch and feeling which would give an exquisite daintiness to an ordinary room would make a public hall or theatre seem blank and colourless; the relative scale would be wrong and the absence of right proportion would be unpleasantly perceptible.

Out of the consciousness that this weakening of the decorative effect is always possible when large surfaces have to be covered with ornament has come quite a crop of failures. So many men who could manage a small undertaking tastefully, and with commendable judgment, have gone hopelessly astray in the attempt to succeed with something more ambitious. In their desire not to be trivial they have run to the opposite extreme, into fussy exaggeration and reckless want of balance. Some have tried to fill space by repeating small details; some, like the painter who executes a little subject on a canvas much too large for it, have merely magnified designs which had not sufficient strength to bear enlarging; and others have imagined that the way out of the difficulty was to be found by depending upon massive forms and strident colour. In each case the result has been lamentably unsatisfactory because it has been brought about by unreasonable methods.

Some telling examples of decorative aberrations can be found abroad. In France especially, there has been, at all periods, a well-marked tendency towards excess of display and towards the development of gorgeous over-elaboration, instead of refinement and repose. Much of the ornamentation which has been in the past, and still is, used there in public buildings and private houses is almost barbaric in its redundancy. It oppresses by its excess, by its

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VERSAILLES

luxurious extravagance and ponderous affectation; and by its insistence it contradicts what should be its worthiest purpose.

The natural leaning in this country has never been in the direction of any such exaggeration. We have always affected a sobriety of aspect which has become at times a little too grim and rigid, though, at others, it has led to the production of decorative work marked by really admirable qualities. The rich picturesqueness of the Elizabethan era, the delicate classicism of the period dominated by the Adam Brothers, even the somewhat second-hand charms of the so-called Queen Anne style, which came into vogue some quarter of a century ago, can all be praised as æsthetically interesting, and as well suited to our requirements. That we should latterly have acquired an inclination to be a little reckless in choosing material for the use of our decorators is not necessarily an advantage. It has caused a great deal of rather incoherent effort, and has introduced an element of artificiality into the practice of our craftsmen which may possibly, if it is allowed to run to excess, bring about changes not altogether desirable. But, at least, the existence of this inclination implies a willingness to profit by the experience of others, and is, therefore, worth educating and, up to a certain point, encouraging as well.

This education and encouragement must, however, be directed especially to the development of that correct understanding of the principles of decoration which has been called taste. If this quality is fostered by training, the habit of ranging about in search of fresh authorities and new ideas cannot fail to be productive of good. It will open the mind of the designer to receive new impressions, it will widen his view of his art and will extend the bounds of his experience, and it will, above all, save him from the danger of relying unduly upon those ancient conventions which delight the pedant and exasperate the man of intelligence.

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